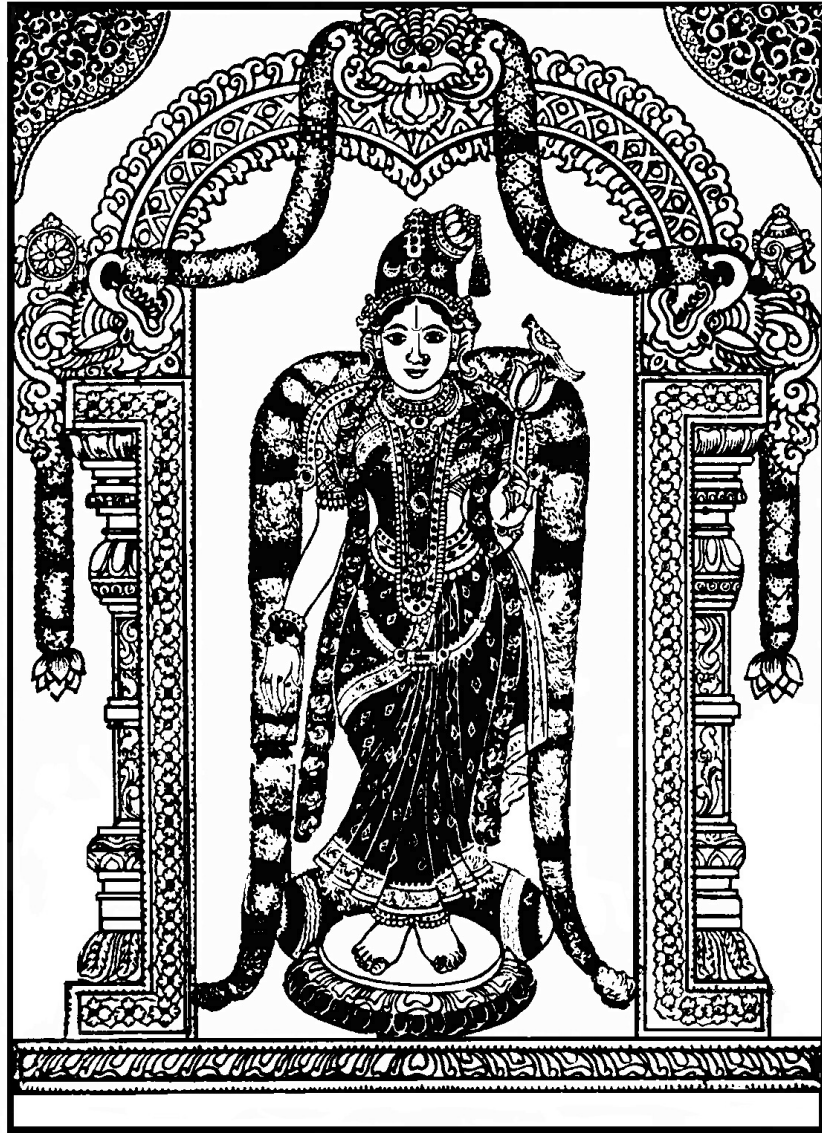


TIRUPPĀVAI

of

Āṇḍāl





śrimate rāmānujāya namaḥ

Āṇḍāl's Tiruppāvai

Preliminary Invocations — Taniyangaḷ

nīlātuṅga-stana giritaṭi suptam udbodhya kṛṣṇam
pārārthyam svaṃ śruti śataśira' siddham adhyāpayantī |
svocchiṣṭāyāṃ sraji nigalitaṃ yā balātkṛtya bhuṅkte
godā tasyai nama idam-idam bhūya evāstu bhūyaḥ ||

I offer my obeisance again and again to Goddess Andal, to Her alone who has awakened Lord Krishna sleeping on the mountain-like lofty breasts of Goddess Nila. Andal has informed Him of her total dependence on Him in accordance with the hundreds of Vedantic texts; Andal who robustly enjoys Him: after binding Him with garlands that she had first worn.

anna vayar puduvaiy āṇḍāl araṅgarku
pannu tiruppāvai palpadiyam, inniśayāl
pāḍi koḍuttāl naṇṇāmālai, pūmālai
cuḍi koḍuttālai collu.

The saint-poetess Andal was born in Srivilliputtur (puduvai) surrounded by paddy-fields and water reservoirs full of beautiful swans. She dedicated her beautiful garland of songs, singing them sweetly. She offered to Him (Krishna) the flower-garland, after wearing it herself. May all of us reverence her and sing her poems.

cuḍi koḍutta cuḍarkkoḍiyē! tolṇāvai,
pāḍi aruḷavalla palṇāiyāi! nāḍi nī
veṅkaḍavar kennai vidi yenṇa imāttam
nāṅgaḍavā vaṇṇame nalhu.

O Andal radiant like flash of lightning! You bedecked yourself first with the garland intended for Lord Ranganatha and then offered it to Him; by your great talent in poetry you composed the renowned and ancient hymn of Tiruppavai. O Andal adorned with many beautiful bangles, please shower your grace on us so that we may become greatly devoted to Lord Krishna; with the same sincerity of devotion that you asked of Kamadeva — "O Kamadeva, be pleased to make me a humble servant and bride of the Lord Venkatesa!"

Introduction — Part A

The opening stanzas 1 — 5 deal with the four fundamental Śrī Vaiṣṇava doctrines, a knowledge of which is an essential prerequisite for spiritual development. These are;—

1. *prāpya svarūpam* — the nature of the goal of life;
2. *prāpaka svarūpam* — the means which can directly lead us to the goal;
3. *adhikāri svarūpam* — the qualifications required for an aspirant who wants to reach the goal through these means;

4. *phala svarūpam* — the results of such a spiritual quest:- the destruction of Karma and care for the wellbeing of others.

☀ Stanza 1

mārgazhi tingal madi niṛainda naṇṇālāl |
 nīrāḍa pōduvīr pōdumiṇō nērizhaiyīr |
 cīr malhum āyppāḍi celva cirumīrhāl |
 kūrvēl koḍun tozhilaṇ nanda gopaṇ kumaraṇ |
 ērārnda kaṇṇi yaśodai iḷaṇciṅgam |
 kār mēṇi ceṅgaṇ kadirmadiyam pōl muhattāṇ |
 nārāyaṇane namakkē parai taruvān |
 pārōr pugazha paḍindelōr empāvāy ||

*The auspicious full moon of Margali is here -
 maidens bejewelled and intent on bathing, come out!
 Darling girls of the cowherd clan
 whose hamlet brims over with beauty and wealth;
 That cruel sharp spear — Nanda's son,
 Young lion of Yashoda with her love-filled eyes
 Cloud-hued, red-eyed, sun and moon for his face
 Nārāyaṇa, himself has offered
 His gracious drum for us
 To sing his praise and gain the world's.*

Commentary

In this stanza a few of the Gopis invite the other Gopis from among the five hundred thousand families of Aypāḍi Gokula) to rise early and to join them so that they can all go together in a group to ask Lord Kṛṣṇa for the *parai* (a drum — symbolic of *puruṣārtha* or the goals of life).

Here we are introduced to the concept of *satsang* or pursuance of the spiritual goal in a company of like-minded seekers.

The month of Mārgazhi (mārgaśīrṣa in Sanskrit— December-January) is the most pleasing month of the year (Kṛṣṇa states in the Bhagavad Gita 10;35 that amongst the months He is Margaśīrṣa), and according to astral time it corresponds to the early morning (*brahma-muhurta*) of the Devas. The weather is cool and this is also the month in which the Sattva Guna is most predominant.

auspicious full-moon day — The full-moon day is considered to be most auspicious for the commencement of devotional activities. Besides, in the moonlight all the Gopis can see each other very clearly, and all of them can go together in a group to enjoy Lord Kṛṣṇa's company. As these girls have moon-like countenances the whole area has the appearance of hundreds of full moons! The term *naṇṇālāl* further denotes that the days that have already passed have been unhappy ones, having been spent in vain, being separated from Kṛṣṇa.

to bathe — The act of bathing here also has a spiritual connotation of 'bathing' in the river or lake of *Bhakti* (Devotion) to Kṛṣṇa. Bathing in the river of Divine Love will remove the heat of suffering of this world and the dirt of material nature. It will bring peace of mind and purity.

"To bathe" in Tamil poetry is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Sex is often used in Classic Hindu literature as a metaphor to describe the union of the *jivātman* (individual Self) with the *Paramātman* (Supreme Self); being the most intimate, pleasant and tender of all human interactions it is an apt way to describe the indescribable union of the jīva with God.

Those who want to come may come to bathe: — This expression indicates that there is no restriction whatsoever for anyone to merge his/her self in the Universal Self by means of *bhakti*. Thus it is evident that all are equal in the eyes of the Lord and those who approach to worship Him should not go alone but always in company. Here the focus is upon a peculiar tenet of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism; — a solitary quest for God is not likely to be as fruitful as a quest in the company of other devotees. Unlike the worldly pleasures which dwindle on being shared with others, Divine Bliss increases when shared with others. The company of a like-minded person whose heart yearns after the Divine, is a great asset in spiritual life. Furthermore, a devotee always desires to share his/her enjoyment with others. In that mood, here, we find Śrī Aṇḍāl inviting all those who want to perform the '*pavai nonbu*' to come to bathe and partake of the Divine Bliss along with her.

bejeweled damsels — This denotes that all the girls are bedecked with beautiful ornaments in order to attract Lord Kṛṣṇa. The jewels also refer metaphorically to the qualities of virtue and righteousness which are the true ornaments of the jīva.

Aypadi flowing with abundance — Gokula is flowing with milk, ghee, food and other necessities, and so there is no lack of anything whatsoever, because the Lord Himself incarnated there in Nanda-gopa's house. This is the place where Lord Kṛṣṇa's qualities shine a thousandfold more than when He was in Paramapada as Nārāyaṇa. In Paramapada His 'transcendence' is the prominent quality, but here in this Gokula, *sauśīlya* (tender compassion) and *saṁlabhya* (accessibility) are the outstanding qualities that he displays.

wealthy young girls — The Rishis of Daṇḍakāraṇya, fascinated by Rāma's beauty, were sexually attracted to Him; and thus in order to fulfill their desire, He ordained them to be born again as Gopis to enjoy His companionship in this the Kṛṣṇa Avatāra. The term *Śrīman* — 'wealthy' indicates companionship and service (*Kaṁkaryam*) to Lord Kṛṣṇa. In the Rāmāyana Vibhīṣaṇa is addressed as '*antarikṣa gata śrīman*', when he was lingering in the sky empty-handed, seeking surrender to Rāma. It is also said that Gajendra was addressed as *śrīman* when he was struggling in the jaws of death caught by the crocodile

Nandagopa, the skilled and severe lancer: — Nanda-gopa is given these attributes to stress the fact that he was ever alert like a sentry guarding Kṛṣṇa from Kaṁsa. In actual fact Nanda-gopa, was by nature very peaceful and compassionate, but after the birth of Kṛṣṇa he became aggressive in order to protect him. Some commentators take this description of a sharp spear to refer to Kṛṣṇa himself because he is so cruel to the Gopis by stimulating their love for Him but not requiting it.

Son of Nanda-gopan and lion-cub of Yasoda — The words have a beautiful meaning; that Kṛṣṇa is a 'archetypal son' always obedient to his foster-father and is even somewhat afraid of him. But to his mother Yasoda, he is a 'lion-cub', constantly causing trouble by his pranks and jokes.

Yasoda, the beautiful-eyed: — Yasoda was able to enhance the beauty of her eyes by constantly looking on the divine form and divine pastime of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The expressions give the feeling that Nanda-gopa was guarding Kṛṣṇa with a spear, while Yasoda was guarding Him with her arrows (the word, arrows denoting 'eyes'.)

Cloud-hued, red-eyed, sun and moon for his face — *Kadir madiyam*: has a dual meaning — just as the sun has power to nourish and to destroy, so has the Lord, but the power of destruction is used only against His enemies. For His devotees, He showers compassion and love, and like the full-moon brings joy to all beings.

Nārāyaṇa alone: — The full import of this sacred name cannot be adequately conveyed in English. Pillai Lokācārya defines the name as follows; —

The word 'Nārāyaṇa' is comprised of two words; —

'Nara' which is the totality of eternal substances, viz. — The Lord's qualities of knowledge, bliss, purity, power, strength, tender love, condescension, etc; the Divine Form of the Lord, effulgent and youthful; divine ornaments and weapons; the Divine consorts; the eternally free Selves; the umbrella and other emblems of the Lord's sovereignty, the divine gatekeepers and other members of the retinue; the liberated Selves, the great cosmic space; the primordial matter; the Selves in bondage; Time, intellect and its manifestations; the various worlds and the devas; and all things, animate and inanimate.

'Ayana' means the refuge or substratum or ground for all these; besides, it also indicates, one who has all the above substances as His 'abode' i.e., one who resides in all these substances. From this it is clear that all things exist in Him and He exists in all things.

Only for us — the suffix ē in Tamil is added for emphasis. By using it here Āṇḍāl indicates her total conviction that the Lord Himself will produce the drum.

a drum — This drum is one of the accessories necessary for the performance of the vow according to stanza. 26. However, what is actually indicated by this word here is not a physical drum, because in stanza 29 it is clearly stated that the 'parai' is symbolic of everlasting, unmotivated service to the feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa

To sing his praise and gain the world's. — The intention of the headmen of Gokula in allowing the Gopis to go and enjoy Kṛṣṇa's company and to celebrate the vow is to obtain rain. When the rains come everyone will shower praise on the Gopis.

elōr empāvāy — This formula is the refrain of the lyric, it is called the Tiruppavai as each stanza ends with the words 'Em-pāvāy'.

Esoteric Purport

O cetanas (Selves)! who are matchless in *jñāna* (wisdom), *bhakti* (devotion) and *vairāgya* (dispassion), who are the inhabitants of this place wherein reside great people totally absorbed in service to the Lord! Come and enjoy *Bhagavat anubhāva* (the union with the Lord) at this auspicious time. The Lord is the supreme ācārya of ācāryas, the Refulgent, the All-merciful. The sight of His Divine Form will remove all our distress. His eyes glow with love and power, He is like a raging conflagration to enemies and like cool moonlight to His devotees. He is Lord Nārāyaṇa, who is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, and repository of all good qualities. He is the only refuge and the only one able to fulfill our desire and to grant us the fruits of the vow which is being undertaken by us for the welfare of all beings.

☀ Stanza 2

va iyattu vāzhvīrhāl nāmum nam pāvaikku |
 ceyyum kiriśaikaḷ kēlīrō | pārkaḍalul
 paiya tuyinna paramaṇ aḍi pāḍi |
 ney unnom pāl unnom nāt kālē nīrāḍi |
 maiyiṭṭezhudōm malar iṭṭu nām muḍiyōm |
 ceyyādana ceyyōm tikuṛaḷai cennōdōm |
 aiyamum piccayum āndanaiyum kai kāṭṭi |
 uyyum āreṇeṇi uhandelōr empāvāy ||

*O People of the world, listen to what we shall do,
 How we shall observe these sacred days. We shall praise the feet
 of that Supreme One Lying on the Ocean of Milk;*

*No ghee, no milk shall we take, and at dawn we shall bathe:
 No collyrium for the eyes; no flowers bound in the hair.
 Avoiding all proscribed deeds, refraining from gossip;
 Giving alms, and making offerings all we can,
 and joyfully seek our liberation.*

Commentary

In this stanza the Gopis are describing the vow that they will be performing and the austerities they will undertake. They will sing the praises of the Supreme Being said to be reclining in yogic trance upon the serpent couch *Ananta Śeṣa* (Infinity) in the sea of milk (the cosmos), contemplating upon the welfare of all beings; sentient and insentient. The feet are the objects of worship because the devotee considers him/herself so humble that s/he is unworthy to even look upon the body or the face of the Supreme Being.

Supreme One Lying on the Ocean of Milk; — this line refers to the three hypostatic emanations that He adopts for the creation (*Pradyumna*), sustentation (*Aniruddha*) and transformation (*Śaṅkarṣana*) of the universe. Whereas in the next verse "*Oṅgi ulagalanda uttaman*" refers to the *Vibhava* which are the incarnations that He takes. (Note: in the first verse transcendence is mentioned and in the 5th verse immanence is mentioned.)

Avoiding all proscribed deeds — this means; avoiding those acts which cause hurt to other living beings by word, deed or thought.

Giving alms, and making offerings all we can, — By '*aiyam*' is meant giving of alms to befitting persons. By '*pichai*' is meant giving of charity to brahmins and sanyāsis.

Esoteric Purport

O cetanas! who are fortunate enough to enjoy the pastimes of the Lord in this Earthly Playground (*Lilavibuti*)! Please listen to what we would do and what we would avoid for the proper fulfillment of our vow (*Kaṅkaryā nonbu*). We shall continually sing the glories of the Lord who gently reclines on the Milky Ocean, contemplating the liberation of this universe. We shall restrain all our other desires; we shall engage in our daily duties (karmas) suited to our station in life (*varṇas*). We will not intentionally adopt *jñāna* (Gnosis – the path of knowledge), *Bhakti* (devotion) or other paths of yoga as our means of attaining the Lord. Although the Lord is characterised by infinite loving kindness (*Vātsalya*¹), still, we should not approach Him directly with the view to obtaining His favour but through some one who is intimately connected with Him. We should try to preach, as much as we can, about the glory of God and His devotees. In this way, if we should strive for our liberation by surrendering ourselves to Him, we are sure to attain fulfillment of our vow of service (*kaṅkaryā nonbu*).

Stanza 3

ōṅgi ulahalaṇḍa uttaman pēr pāḍi |
 nāṅgaḷ nam pāvaikkū śāttu nīrāḍināl |
 tīṅṅinni nāḍellām tiṅgaḷ mummāri peydu |
 ōṅgu peruṇ cennelūḍu kayal uhaḷa |
 pūṅguvalai pōḍīḷ porivaṇḍu kaṇpaḍuppa |

¹ *Vātsalya* is derived from 'vatsa' which means a calf — the love of the Lord is like that of the mother cow which licks the filth from the body of her new-born and eats the omentum.

tēṅgādē pukkirundu cīrtta mulai patti
vāṅga | kuḍam niṛaikkum vaḷḷal perum paśugaḷ |
nīṅgāda śelvam niṛaindelōr empāvāy ||

*If we sing that Great One's name, who shot up and measured the earth
with a single stride; and go for our ritual bath,
Thrice a month will the rains fall and no drought will come,
Swelling red paddy, the kayil fish wriggling amongst them,
And spotted bees will doze in the blue lilies.
Big cows with their udders full will yield milk at a touch.
A flood of milk to fill our cans to the brim;
And wealth unfailing will fill the land.*

Commentary

In this stanza Godā pays her obeisance to the incarnation of Vāmana in which He appears as a young student — brahmacarin, to ask three strides of land from the pious & generous but supremely egoistic and acquisitive demon king Bali. The land was granted and the Lord immediately expanded His form, and with two strides covered the entire manifest universe. He then asked Bali where the third step should be placed; Bali bowed His head for the Lord to step thereupon. Bali was pushed down into the nether regions and was granted immortality and sovereignty over the nether worlds. The ācāryas praise this incarnation above the others because everything belongs to the Lord anyway, yet, He takes the form of a poor brahmin boy and goes to seek a favour from a human being. It is the only incarnation in which no-one was injured and everyone received the grace of the Lord. In contemplating upon this most compassionate of the divine incarnations at the outset, and stating the results that they hope to obtain, Godā is expressing her great confidence in being able to secure the Grace of the Lord.

that Great One — there are four categories of people in this world;

1. *adhamādhaman* — who does evil in return for the good received;
2. *adhaman* — one who does not give anything in return for good rendered; or according to Peria-acchān-Piḷḷai — one who lives at the expense of others.
3. *madhyaman* — one whose help is commensurate with the help received. (Peria-acchān-Piḷḷai defines it as 'one who feels that others too should also live as oneself')
4. *uttaman* — one who does good to others without expecting anything in return. (Peria-acchān-Piḷḷai describes it as 'one who feels that others should live comfortably even at the expense of one's own comforts'.)

Such an Great One is the Lord who measured the world as Trivikrama; for He set His lotus feet on the heads of all without any discrimination whatsoever — prince or peasant, rich or poor, the philosopher or the fool, all experienced the touch of His Divine Feet though they have not done anything good to Him.

If we sing that Great One's name — praising the name of the Lord, and not praising the Lord Himself. Thus we infer that the 'name' of the Lord possesses greater efficacy than even the Lord Himself.

The Rāmāyana tells us that Hanumān crossed the sea with the greatest of ease after reciting the name of Rāma; but, on the other hand Rāma himself had to build a bridge with great difficulty in order to cross it! In order to chant the Lord's names no qualification or spiritual discipline is necessary. The lord's name itself confers all qualifications. One who is about to take bath in the Ganges need not take a preliminary bath in some pool!

Thrice a month will the rains fall — The reasons for three rains per month are not only that the land will flourish but also the King's administration, the meditations of the sages, and the virtue of the people will flourish in the land.

Swelling red paddy, — The tallness of the paddy is specially referred to here because the Gopis always think about the high stature of the Lord. To them all things in nature possess an affinity with the Lord. (Great ācāryas like Bhaṭṭar and Ālavandār, if they happened to see red lotus flowers in paddy fields, with full-grown paddy stalks bending before them, used to be reminded of the lotus feet of the Lord, being worshipped by many devotees prostrating themselves.) The term 'ongu' suggests that the paddy crop cannot grow horizontally due to the luxuriant growth on the sides.

the kayil fish wriggling amongst them: — The fish are wriggling between the tall stalks of paddy due to the lack of space for them to swim about. Fish used to be cultivated in the paddy fields to eat the mosquito larvae.

Esoteric Purport

O cetanas! Sometimes a jīva may, by the infinite grace of God, obtain *jñāna* or knowledge about the Supreme Godhead. This is an indication that the Lord dwelling within one's being (*Antaryāmin*) is greatly pleased with one and in order to liberate one from the bonds of Samsāra, crowns one with His lotus feet. If we chant the glories of the names of Nārāyaṇa while under the pretext of celebrating the vow, the false identification of the Self with the body will spontaneously vanish. A true realisation of the threefold-nature of the Self (*svarūpa-traya*) will dawn on us as a result of the increase in *sattva guna*. Those who are able to associate with such realised persons greatly value what they have attained. In the heart of such sages (*jñānis*) Bhagavān dwells in all His glory, along with Mother Lakṣmī. Such a realised jñāni will teach the disciples all that they ought to know, so that they too will attain self-realisation like themselves, and bless them with the ability to experience God (*Bhagavat guṇānubhava*). In this way, there is no doubt that our *kainkarya nonbu* will have a successful end and there will be prosperity in the land.

☀ Stanza 4

āzhi mazhai kannā onnu nī kai karavēl |
 azhiyuḷ pukku muhandu koḍārtēṇi |
 uzhi mudalvan uruvampōl mey kaṇuttu |
 pāzhiyan tōḷ uḍaip paṇpanābhan kaiyil
 āzhipōl minni | valamburi pōl ninnu adirndu |
 tāzhāde śārṅgam udaitta śara mazhaipōl |
 vāzhā ulahinil peydiḍāy | nāṅgaḷum
 mārgazhi nirāḍa mahizhndelōr empāvāy ||

*O Great Varuna, God of Rain, withhold not anything!
 Plunge into the sea, fill up, rise with splendour;
 Assume the dark hue of the Primordial Cause;
 Blaze with lightning like the Discus in Padmanabha's hand.
 Thunder like the conch above His strong shoulder;
 Pour down your showers in abundance,
 like arrows from His bow Sarṅga. That we and the world
 may live, and bathe in the joyous month of Margali.*

Commentary

Here Godā again stresses her desire for rain, and addresses this invocation to the Rain-god Varuna. He is not addressed as an independent deity but is referred to as an executive of the Supreme Being Kṛṣṇa. After poetically describing the precipitation process she requests Varuna to assume the dark blue form of Kṛṣṇa who is the Primordial cause of the universe. Kṛṣṇa is known as *Meghaśyāma* — "cloud coloured One". Godā now uses similes of Kṛṣṇa's three weapons to describe the phenomena associated with rain. The lightning is likened to the discus *Sudarśana* ('Pleasing to behold'.) The discus which moves at the speed of light represents the Universal Mind. It is discharged for the punishment of the wicked and the salvation of the devotees. The conch — *Pāñcajanya*, was born of the sea; from the primordial ocean of creation. It is symbolic of the emanation of the cosmos and of the sound AUM. Its tumultuous sound is meant to proclaim the Lord's saving grace. In His incarnation as Rāma, the lord used the bow — *śārṅga*, to defeat the demonic host of the Rākṣasas lead by Rāvaṇa. Here the bow is invoked to destroy the demon of drought.

Esoterically the cloud is said to represent the great preceptors (*ācāryas*). They collate spiritual knowledge from many sources, distil the essence and then spread it all over the world in a form easily understood by the masses. This they do without any expectation of gain or selfish motive, the only reason being their boundless compassion for suffering beings.

Most of the Ālvārs who preceded Aṇḍāl in their hymns compared the Lord to the clouds, but Śrī Aṇḍāl on the contrary compares the clouds to the Lord. To her the Lord is *upamāna*, the known object, with which the object of description, ie, *nāmeyam* is sought to be compared. This shows Aṇḍāl's excessive devotion to the Lord.

O Rain-god! — this expression can be split into two forms:—

(1) *āzhi mazhaikku annā* and

(2) *āzhi mazhai kannā* The second rendering implies that whatever the Gopis see appears to them as the All-seeing Godhead. Kṛṣṇa takes the place of food to eat, water to drink and betel and nut to chew.

enter the depths of the deep seas — for the water on the surface and that which is near the shore will be polluted.

Thundering — "You should not behave like Kṛṣṇa who hides Himself when performing His duty of protection, but you must demonstrate your presence to us by rising into the sky with a thunderous sound."

The Primordial Cause of the universe — Kṛṣṇa protects all the beings in the world by keeping them safe in His abdomen during the deluge and then bringing them out again with the next cycle of creation. This concept has been well described by the word '*nābhan*' in the term '*padmanābhan*' in line four. The word connotes "He who created Brahman from His navel who in turn created the world."

Assume the dark hue — 'O Parjanya! You may be able to emulate the dark complexion of Lord Kṛṣṇa and appear in the form of a rain cloud, but you can never possess His boundless compassion.'

thunder like His conch — 'Unlike the sound of Kṛṣṇa's Pāñcajanya which terrifies His enemies and delights His devotees, your roar of thunder delights the hearts of all (both enemies and friends) and all creation dances in joy'.

Pour down your showers in abundance, like arrows from His bow Sarṅga. — This expression connotes that even if the Lord delays in destroying His enemies, His Sarṅga bow

will shower rain of arrows unceasingly upon them. — 'O Parjanya do not to rain like the arrows of the bow causing destruction and misery but rain in such a way as to make the world flourish.

We can also take our Margali bath:— The attitude of the girls is that their rejoicings are only secondary to Universal well-being, which is primary. This expression implies that they live for others and not for their own sake.

Esoteric Purport

“O ācārya-puruṣa! who fully comprehends the various auspicious qualities of Bhagavan Śrī Kṛṣṇa. By your wisdom you are able to prepare those who take refuge in you, for receiving Kṛṣṇa's grace! Please never cease preaching about Kṛṣṇa (*bhagavad viśaya*) to your disciples. Dive deep into the ocean of divine attributes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, obtain wisdom and realisation about the communicable attributes and then be seated upon the *Vyāsāsana* (ācārya's seat). O ācārya, you are full of grace and radiant like the form of the Lord. You, in whose heart bhagavān dwells along with His consort Lakṣmī, should spread your brilliance around like that of Sudarśana Cakra. You should preach the meaning of the sacred name (*praṇavārtham*) to everyone, like the roar of Pāñcājanya. Through understanding the true meaning of the mantra they will gain wisdom about the intimate relationship between the Lord and the Self (*śeṣa-śeṣi* relationship). As a result of this self/God-realisation they will be saved from the Ocean of Samsāra. If we, who consider service to the Lord (*bhagavata kainkarya*) as our aim in life, with a joyful heart perform the obligatory and periodic rites (*nitya & naimitika karmas*) which are greatly appreciated and observed by the devotees (*bhāgavatas*), we are sure to obtain our reward which is the welfare of all beings (*loka-saṅgraha*).

☀ Stanza 5

māyanai mannu vaḍa madurai maindanai |
 tūya perunīr yamunai turaivanai |
 āyar kulattinil tōnnum aṇi-viḷakkai |
 tāyai kuḍal viḷakkan ceyda dāmodaranai |
 tūyōmāy vandu nām tūmalar tūvit tozhuḍu |
 vāyināl pāḍi manattināl cindikka |
 pōya pizhaiyum puhudaruvān ninnanavum |
 tīyinil tūśāhum ceppēlōr empāvāy ||

*Northern Mathura's mysterious child,
 The one who plays in the pure waters of the Yamuna river,
 Emerald-like; the radiant lamp of the cowherd clan,
 The Lord Damodara who has illumined his mother's womb,
 Let us, all pure, adore him with fresh flowers, pay our obeisance
 and sing his praises. Let us meditate upon Him.
 Our sins both past and present and those yet to come will vanish
 like cotton in a fire. Therefore let us sing His glory.*

Commentary

Godā in this verse teaches the means of devotional service; — making simple offerings of flowers, chanting Kṛṣṇa's name and silently meditating upon His refulgent form. The result of such spiritual practice is the absolution of sins and the attainment of spiritual purity.

The Mysterious child — Kṛṣṇa is addressed here as *Māyan*, this epithet sums up the nature of the Supreme Being as being inscrutable, beyond the comprehension of the human mind. The activities and pastimes of Kṛṣṇa will always remain a mystery.

[Born in] Northern Mathura — Yet this Transcendent Godhead (*Para-Vasudeva*) has taken birth due to His boundless compassion, in the humble circumstances of a prison in the Northern city of Mathura (here differentiated from the Southern city of Madura).



In the pure waters of the river Yamuna — it is said that the purity of the waters of the Yamuna is due to Lord Kṛṣṇa and the Gopis playing in them, gargling and splashing themselves. The waters experienced the Divine touch of the Lord and therefore have become pure.

The Godāvari River never imparted any information to Rāma about Sitā, due to fear of Rāvaṇa, though Sitā had specifically requested her to do so. Yamuna by contrast, assisted Vāsudeva to carry the child Kṛṣṇa to Gokula, not being afraid of Kaṁsa, although she was flowing underneath the very palace of the demon — herein lies the purity of the Yamuna.

The Yamuna helped Vāsudeva by flowing knee-deep at first, then with a desire to touch of the lotus feet of the Lord, she began to rise up higher and higher until she reached the mouth of Vāsudeva. Vāsudeva in fear raised the child from his shoulders over his head and while he

was doing so the child Kṛṣṇa stretched out his leg and touched the waters and lo and behold, the water-level suddenly dropped and flowed once again knee-deep. *Damodara, who illumined (purified) His mother's womb* — Kṛṣṇa brought such fame to His mother that the entire world wonders what austerity she did in order to beget such a son! Kṛṣṇa was born to Devakī but was fostered out to Yaśoda; so here the reference to "mother's womb" applies to Yaśoda who acted as the functional mother of Kṛṣṇa, and not to Devakī who was the natural mother. The name *Damodara* refers to His pastime of breaking the butter pots and Yaśoda in order to restrain him tried to bind Him with a piece of rope needless to say she did not succeed in her endeavour!

Once guru Nañjiyar was asked why the wet garment of the Lord Ranganātha was slowly removed from beneath only after the dry garment was placed up to the chest. Nañjiyar replied that this was to prevent the imprint from the rope from around His waist becoming visible to the Gopis, and thus to avoid giving them the chance to jeer at Him!

Let us, all pure, [in thought, word and deed] — How is it that the Gopis declare that they have become pure before they have even taken a bath? Here the purity referred to is mental-purity obtained by love of the Lord (*Bhakti*). Rāma accepted the fish brought by Guha, the hunter, by declaring that it was perfectly pure because it was offered to him with love. Draupadi cried to the Lord for help, when she was in her period, the Lord responded immediately.

adore him with fresh flowers, pay our obeisance and sing his praises. Let us meditate upon Him. — The purity of the flowers consists in their being placed at the lotus feet of the Lord.

The sequence of performing an action is first to conceive of it in the mind, then express it by speech, and thereafter perform the physical action. This is the usual order in doing any karma or action, but here we find the order reversed. The implication by Śrī Āṇḍāl is that the Lord will shower His grace on us even if we worship Him in the reverse order.

By worshipping Lord Kṛṣṇa with all our three Kāraṇas (instruments); — through the mind by engaging in contemplating the glories and pastimes of Kṛṣṇa. Through speech by singing His glories and chanting the Holy Name, and through the body by engaging ourselves in the service of the Lord by offering flowers at His feet — we will be absolved of all our sins, those already committed and those we are likely to commit in future;— like a bundle of cotton burnt by a spark of fire.

Esoteric Purport

If we, with hearts aching for Kṛṣṇa, sing of His glories and Divine pastimes, meditate with a steady mind on His Divine form, surrender ourselves completely unto Him and serve Him who resides in Mathura and other holy places where His Divine presence is always felt; who is omniscient, who has liberated His mothers Kauśalya and Devakī from the bonds of future births and deaths by granting them liberation; who is easily swayed by the love of His devotees and responds as if they were in control — then all our sins — past and future, will vanish like a bale of cotton touched by a spark of fire.

Tuyelizhāi — The Awakening — Part B.

Stanzas 6 to 15 describe how the Gopis who have arisen first go to the houses of those who are still in bed, and awaken them so that they may all go in a group to Kṛṣṇa's mansion and enjoy His companionship under the pretext of celebrating the vow (*nonbu*). The reasons for going in a group to seek the Lord and to participate in the Divine Bliss, and not individually are as follows: —

Firstly, just as one seeks the help of others before venturing into a flooded river, so also the tendency of every lover of God is to secure the help of similar aspirants before s/he plunges into the river of *bhakti*, for, the qualities of the Lord during mystical absorption may overwhelm one completely.

Nammālvar warns us "O poets! Safeguard yourselves before venturing on service to the Lord " (Tiru vāy-mozhi 10-7-1.)

Secondly, it is not proper that one should enjoy anything in solitude. One should share one's pleasure with others.

Thirdly, the company of those who are in love with God is a great asset in approaching the Lord. Saint Nammālvar says that we should do service to the Lord only with the help of learned Vedāntins Cp:- (*vedam vallargalaik koṇḍu vinnor perumān tirup-pādam panindu*).

In the Bhagavad Gita X;9 it states "bodhayantaḥ parasparam" the devotees of God should constantly be enlightening and encouraging each other.

Each of the Gopis who is awoken, has a particular characteristic of her own. Some commentators have taken these to be cryptic references to the Āḷvārs while others opine that they refer to the ācāryas.

Vanamāmalai Jiyar in his *swapadeśa* (commentary) on Tiruppāvai opines that Śrī Āṇḍāl here awakens the ten Ālvārs in the following order:—

Stanza 6 — Poigai Ālvār; 7 — Peyālvār; 8 — Bhutattālvār; 9 — Tirumalisai Ālvār; 10 — Kulaśekhara Ālvār; 11 — Peri-ālvār; 12 — Toṇḍaraḍippodi-ālvār; 13 — Tiruppānālvār; 14 — Nammālvār; 15 — Tirumaṅgai Ālvār.

Other scholars give the following order:-

Stanza 6 — Periyālvār; 7 — Kulaśekara Ālvār; 8 — Nammālvār; 9 — Tirumalisai Ālvār; 10 — Peyālvār; 11 — Butattālvār; 12 — Poigai Ālvār; 13 — Toṇḍaraḍippodi Ālvār; 14 — Tiruppān-ālvār; 15 — Tirumangai-ālvār.

The stanzas 6 to 15 are also said to indicate the awakening of the ten ācāryas respectively according to the order of the ācārya Parampara —

1. Guru, 2. Parama-guru, 3. Sarva-guru, 4. śrī rāmānuja, 5. śrī parāṅkuśadāsa, 6. śrī yāmuna-muni, 7. śrī rāma-miśra, 8. śrī puṇḍarīkākṣa, 9. śrī nāthamuni, 10. śrī śaṭhakopa

God can only be approached through the mediation of the spiritual preceptor and so Godā is approaching the ācāryas seeking their aid and intercession for finally attaining Kṛṣṇa Himself.

☀ Stanza 6

puḷḷum cilampina kān puḷ araiyan kōyilil |
 vellai viḷi śangin pēr-aravam kēṭṭilaiyō ? |
 piḷḷāy ezhundirāy | pēymulai nañju uṇḍu |
 kaḷḷa cakaṭam kalakku kazhiya kāl ōcci |
 vellattu aravil tuyil amarnda vittinai |
 uḷḷatu koṇḍu munivargaḷum yogihaḷum |
 meḷḷa ezhundu ari enna pēr aravam |
 uḷḷam puhundu kuḷirndu ēlōr empāvāy ||

*The birds are chirping; can't you hear in the Bird King's temple
 the thunderous sounds of the great white conch ?
 Awake, O Young maiden, ever contemplating in your mind
 the One who drank the milk of Putana, the One who with a kick destroyed
 Sakatasura, the One who is the Primal Cause of the whole cosmos,
 and the One who reclines on the Serpent in the Milky Ocean;
 the sages and the yogis have just arisen slowly from their yoga, loudly chanting
 the names of Hari, resounding, let that Name enter our hearts and refresh us.*

Commentary

In this stanza the gopi addressed has just recently attained love of God and has just started on the path of devotional service.

[even] the birds are chirping — The particle *um* in *pullum* conveys the idea that the fact that we have arisen from our beds and are making noises is sufficient in itself to indicate that dawn is approaching. In addition to this, the birds have also begun to chirp. The chirping birds are also indicative of the great saints singing the glories of the Lord at the break of the spiritual dawn of enlightenment.

in the Bird King's [Garuda] temple — refers to Kṛṣṇa riding upon Garuḍa. The shrine of Garuḍa is always outside, facing the Sanctum of the Lord and so the conch is usually blown near that shrine at daybreak.

“Can’t you hear the thunderous sounds of the great white conch?” — the Gopi being awakened doesn’t seem to accept the chirping of the birds or the entreaties of the other Gopis as an indication of the approach of the dawn, so the Gopis call her attention to another indication — the temple conch.

“Awake, O Young maiden!” — suggests that the Gopi awoken is a novice in Devotional Service, who does not know that we should approach the Lord with the help of other Bhāgavatas.

the One who drank the milk of Putana — The reason for using the word ‘Pey’ (demoness) is in order to frighten the sleeping Gopi to get up quickly in fear for the safety of Kṛṣṇa. Putana was a demoness who tried to suckle Kṛṣṇa with poisoned milk. Kṛṣṇa drank to His fill with no deleterious affect at all, and sucked out the life-breath of Putana at the same time. She too was granted liberation for playing the part of Kṛṣṇa’s mother and affecting love for Him, even although her intention was to kill Him. If such a person is granted liberation how much more those who truly love the Lord!

the One who with a kick destroyed Sakatasura — Śakaṭāsura was a demon who took the shape of a cart in order to crush Kṛṣṇa but with one kick He destroyed him. Esoterically the cart represents the human body with its senses as horses. Although it tends to run amok at times it can be restrained by the touch of the Lord’s foot which confers liberation

the One who reclines on the Serpent in the Milky Ocean — ādiśeṣa - the thousand-headed Serpent of Eternity acts as a cool silken bed so that Kṛṣṇa may not feel any discomfort whatsoever. The inhalation and exhalation of ādiśeṣa acts as a lullaby. The waves of the Milky Ocean gently swing Him to sleep.

The sages and the yogis — By ‘munivar’ is meant those like Bharata who constantly meditate on the Lord and His attributes. By ‘yogi’ is meant those who do service to the Lord like Lakṣmana. The Supreme Lord dwells in the hearts of these yogis and sages, who are free from the three afflictions of life — physical, mental and natural.

have just arisen slowly from their yoga — yogis rise up slowly from their beds or yoga practice because of their intense love of the lord, and fear of disturbing Him who dwells within their hearts!

loudly chanting the names of Hari — The name ‘Hari’ possesses the greatest significance among all the other names of lord Nārāyaṇa. It means “He who liberates us from the bonds of Material Nature by destroying our sense of Self — ‘ahaṁkāra” and sense of possession ‘mamākāra’ and so devotees always utter the name of Hari when they rise up from their beds early in the morning.

Esoteric Purport

The devotees (Bhāgavatas) filled with the quality of goodness (sattva guṇa), rise from their beds to perform their daily karmas according to their station and stage of spiritual development (varṇāśrama dharma); and while rising they chant the holy name of the Lord. "O cetana, a novice in devotional service! Can’t you hear the loud voice of the ācāryas preaching to their disciples about the meaning of the middle letter in Praṇava mantra — U, wherein, it is said, the Almighty dwells? Arise! O cetana! This is the auspicious time for worshipping the Lord. The sacred name of ‘Hari’ chanted by munis and yogis — that Hari, who will shower His grace on us by destroying our selfish desire (kāma) and anger (krodha) and the sinful activities which result from these negative emotions. He is the first and primordial cause of the world, and reclines in Yogic sleep on the bed of ādiśeṣa in the Milky ocean. He has entered our being and granted us beatitude.

The learned scholars who consider that in this verse a Gopi resembling Periyāḷvar is awakened consider that the form of address '*pillāi*' is applicable to Periyāḷvar for in his love for the Lord he forgot that the Lord is omnipotent, and began to bless Him for His safety (*maṅgalāśāsanam*). Furthermore, he was well acquainted with the signs of the approach of dawn like 'the chirping of birds' etc, for he spent most of his time in his tulsi garden cultivating flowers for the Lord's garlands. The expression '*pullaraiyan*' fits in well, with Periyāḷvar, for he is said be an expansion 'amśam' of Garuda. The phrase, *veḷḷattu aravil tuyil amarnda vittinai uḷḷatu koṇḍu* conveys the same meaning as the word 'Vishnu Chitta' which means — 'one who always meditates on Vishnu'.

Other scholars of the Jiyar school of thought hold the view that the Gopi awakened in this verse resembles Poigai Āḷvār. This conclusion is also reached from the word '*Pillāi*'.

According to Acharya Parampara, it is said that in this verse is awakened one's own Acharya:— 'Asmat Guru'.

☀ Stanza 7

kīsu kīsennu engum ānaiccāttan | kalandu
 pēcina pēccaravam kēṭṭilaiyo? pēy peṇṇe! |
 kācum piṇappum kalakalapak kaipērttu |
 vāca naṇung kuzhal āycciyar | mattināl
 ōsai paḍuttu tayir aravam kēṭṭilaiyo?
 nāyaka peṇpillāy! nārāyaṇan mūrtti |
 kēśavanai pāḍuvum nī kēṭṭē kiḍattiyō?
 tēcam uḍaiyāy! tiravēlōr empāvāy ||

*"Kisu kisu" the king-crows screech in chorus after copulating,
 conveying senseless notes; can't you hear O deluded girl!
 The matrons of the cowherd clan, with fragrance wafting from their locks
 churn the curd, their arms going back and forth,
 their bangles and necklaces making a tumultuous sound, do you not hear it?
 O headman's daughter, how can you hear our hymns
 in praise of Nārāyaṇa; The Killer of Kesi, and yet sleep on ?
 O damsel of glittering splendour, open your door!*

Commentary

Godā now calls to a maiden who knows Kṛṣṇa but does not yet love Him. She is called "deluded" because she is still lethargic and careless about her devotional service. There are so many indications that the time for prayer and devotion has arrived and yet she remains fast asleep.

after copulation — after mingling and copulating with one another, with no difference whatsoever.

'deluded girl' & 'headman's daughter' — These expressions (*pēy peṇṇe* and *nāyaka peṇpillāy*) — suggest that the Gopi, who is addressed in this verse has knowledge of God but has forgotten that one should approach the Lord with the company of other Bhāgavatas.

In praise of Nārāyaṇa - Kesava — Kṛṣṇa is here referred to by the epithet "Kesava" recalling His pastime of destroying the demon Kesi who came to kill Him in the form of an ass. The ass is also a symbol of ignorance and stubbornness! (Godā also acknowledges here a fundamental theological point that Kṛṣṇa is none other than Nārāyaṇa).

Esoteric Purport

Awake, O cetana! neglectful of devotional service. Can't you hear the conversation among the pure devotees (*parama bhāgavatas*) who are taking leave from one another, after a long period of socialising? Why do you waste your time in sleep, disregarding everything that you have learnt about the nature of the Supreme Being (*bhagavat viśaya*)? The ācāryas are engaged in heated discussions about the esoteric meanings of the three sacred mantras (*tirumantra*, *dvaya* and *carama śloka*), and their inter-dependence. These great devotees who have clear knowledge about the aim of life (*puruṣārtha*), the means of attaining it and about the absolute dependence upon Kṛṣṇa (*ananyarha śeṣatvam*), are preaching to cetanas who are still deeply entangled in the ocean of Samsāra. O cetana! who is qualified to become the chief among the Bhāgavatas, you are a suitable person to guide us to the Lord.



Is it proper on your part to be idle and indolent, wasting time in this manner! Are you absorbed in mindfulness of the auspicious and beneficent qualities (*kalyāṇa guṇas*) of Śrī Kṛṣṇa/ Nārāyaṇa whom we are praising? O cetana! who is fortunate in possessing the Lord's grace in full! If you overcome your ego (*ahaṁkāra*) and idea of possession (*mamākāra*) and plunge into the ocean of God-realisation (*Bhagavat guṇānubhava*) along with us, our vow (*nonbu*) will undoubtedly be successful.

Some commentators regard that this verse is directed at a Gopi resembling Kulaśekhara-Āḷvār. The three epithets — '*pey-penne*' (crazy), '*nayakapen-pillay*' (crown princess) and '*tesa-mudaiyay*' (radiant damsel) emphasise that Kulaśekhara is referred to here. Kulaśekhara, in his Tirumoli calls himself a mad man in the verse 3. In other verses the Āḷvār also speaks of himself as a female; and among the order of Āḷvārs, he is said to occupy the central place (crown princess).

The expression "*kēṭṭē kiḍattiyo*" may be considered as referring to Kulaśekhara because he would be daily engrossed in hearing the Rāmāyaṇa. One day when listening to the tale of the war at Janasthāna between Rāma single handed and Khara supported by 14,000 rākṣasas; Kulaśekhara forgetting that he was listening to a discourse immediately ordered the mobilisation of his troops to help Rāma! The storyteller was amazed and at once had the presence of mind to expound that Rāma won a tremendous victory over the demons and was reunited with Sitā. Kulaśekhara stopped his expedition. Such was the intensity of his devotion to Rāma.

The Jiyar school is of the opinion that the Gopi awakened in this pāśuram is actually Peyāḷvar. Confirmed by the expression '*pey-penne*'. Further, the girl has knowledge of God but has forgotten to go to Him, in the company of others. So also Peyāḷvar says in Munṛam Tiruvaṇḍādi Stanza 1 that he has forgotten and neglected all that he knew about Kṛṣṇa.

☀ Stanza 8

kīzhvānam vellenṛerumai ciṛu vīḍu |
mēyvān parandana kāṇ mikkullā piḷḷaiḡalum |

pōvān pōkinnārai pōgāmal kattu | unnai
 kūvavān vandu ninnōm | kothukalam uḍaiya
 pāvāy! ezhundirāy, pāḍi paṛai koṇḍu |
 mā vāy piḷandānai mallarai māṭṭiya |
 devādi devanai cennu nām cevittāl |
 āvāvennārāyndaruḷ ēlōr empāvāy ||

*Dawns breaks in the east, and the buffaloes
 let loose a short while, are grazing all over.
 We detained many that would have gone,
 and have come here to call you out. O Jubilant Maiden,
 rise up! Let us sing that He may give us the drum.
 Let us go to the Killer of Kesi, to the Slayer of the Wrestlers,
 To the God of gods let us go and offer obeisance and service.
 Taking pity on us indeed, Krishna will bestow upon us His grace.*

Commentary

In this verse Godā awakens a maiden who is more advanced in the spiritual path.

the buffaloes let loose a short while, are grazing all over — The words "*ciṛu vīḍu*" indicate the custom of allowing buffaloes to graze on the dewy grass for a short time, just before milking so that they may yield milk in larger quantities. This is a short period of release in contrast to the longer period of release for major grazing throughout the day.

Peria-acchān-piḷlay expresses great surprise that Aṇḍāl being the daughter of the Brahmin Periyālvar must have been well acquainted with Agnihotra and other yajñas is now so transformed into a Gopi that she is fully conversant with all their customs!

We detained many that would have gone — This clearly depicts that we should not approach the Lord without the aid of other Bhāgavatas. Vibhīṣana had to surrender himself to Rāma with the help of monkey-people (*vānara-mudalis*).

"You should worship the Supreme Lord of Heavenly Beings, through those who know the Vedas".
 (Tiruvaymoli. 4-6-8)

Akrura was directed by Kamsa, to bring Kṛṣṇa to be tortured and Akrura proceeded with mingled feelings of joy and regret; joy at the prospect of meeting the Lord, the highest aim in one's life and regret of the purpose of the mission itself.

O jubilant maiden — '*kotukalam*' is from the Sanskrit word '*kautukalam*' which means joyful; it may also mean 'the Gopi who is especially loved and adored by Śrī Kṛṣṇa'.

the Killer of Kesi, to the Slayer of the Wrestlers — Godā refers to two incidents in the life of Kṛṣṇa. The killing of the demon Keśi who appeared in the form of a wild ass and the dispatching of the two wrestlers Muṣṭika and Cānūra sent to kill him by the wicked Kamsa. The Demon Keśi esoterically represents the ego and the two wrestlers are desire and anger. These three represent the greatest obstacles on the path to God-realisation.

To the God of gods let us go — It is proper that Kṛṣṇa should come to our place to meet us; but on the other hand, we are going to His abode. Periya Acchān Piḷlai renders the meaning as:— 'We are going to his abode to show our frames, emaciated due to the Lord's separation from us'.

Esoteric Purport

Awake O Swamin! who is blessed with Divine Grace in full. The propitious time for the development of the quality of goodness (*sattva guna*) has arrived. We have held back other

devotees from approaching the Lord alone, telling them that one should worship God in company of the devotees. These devotees now consider the act of going to the Lord's presence, itself their sole aim in life. Now, all of us have come here to invite you to join us. Awaken, O Swamin who is absorbed in devotion! If we approach Kṛṣṇa— the destroyer of Ego and Possessiveness, the Lord of the Angelic host (*Nityasuris*) while chanting His names, He can in no way deny us His protection. His Grace will remove all our defects, and our *nonbu* will be successful.

The Gopi awakened in this verse possesses the characteristics Nammālvar. The words — (O you ever jubilant girl!) apply to Nammālvar because the term *kotukalam* also means 'a desire for sexual enjoyment' and Nammālvar often declares a desire to physically enjoy the Lord and the Lord in turn had a desire to accept him. In the Tiruvāymoli he often speaks of himself as a girl — *pāvāy* (Tiruvāymoli 4-2-2, Tiruvāymoli 6-7-3)

The comman 'rise up' (*ezhundirāy*) also applies specifically to him because among the Ālvārs, he is the only one who is always depicted as seated. The phrase 'dwan breaks in the east' (*kīzhvānam velleṇeru*) can also be specifically related to Nammālvar because, when the sun (Nammālvar) arose at the beginning of the Kali Yuga, he dispelled the darkness of ignorance from this mundane world by His great poem the Tiruvāymoli. Some commentators consider that "small release" refers to Kaivalya Mokṣa and Nammālvar refers to this kind of Mokṣa in Tiruvāymoli 4-1-10 and 4-9-10.

and have come here to call you out — from this it is evident that the Gopi referred to occupied the highest status among all the Gopis, just as Nammālvar occupies the highest status among the other Ālvārs. Nammālvar is said to be the '*avayavi*' while other Ālvārs are considered to be '*avayavas*'

☀ Stanza 9

tūmaṇi māḍattuc cuttam viḷakkeriya |
 dhūpam kamazha tuyil aṇaimēl kaṇvalarum |
 māmān mahale! maṇi kadavam tāḷi tiṇavāy |
 māmīr! avalai yezhuppīrō? un mahāḷ tān |
 umaīyō? aṇṇic ceṇḍō? anantalō? |
 ēmaṇ perunduyil mandira pāttālō? |
 mā māyan mādhan vaikuntan ennennu |
 nāmam palavum navinnēlōr empāvāy ||

*With the lamps blazing in a bejewelled chamber on a soft bed,
 Fragrant smoke of incense wafting around; you lie asleep.
 O Cousin! Arise! Open the bolt on the ornate door!
 Auntie Dear! Won't you awaken her? Is your daughter
 Dumb or deaf, exhausted or tired?
 Or has she been bound by a spell of stupor?
 Let us all recite as a remedy the names of Govinda;
 O Lord of Maya! O Madhava! O Lord of Vaikunta!*

Commentary

In this verse a Gopi who is a self-complacent devotee is being aroused. Everyone perceives the world subjectively and this is why it is considered so important for one to seek the intercession of an independent objective person (*ācārya*) who can guide us to our higher goal God-realisation. The aunt addressed here is taken by some commentators to refer to Lakṣmi who is the mediator between the jīvas and Kṛṣṇa. In Scripture it is taught that chanting the

names of God is the panacea for all the ills of the material world.

With the lamps blazing — It may also appear to one standing outside that there are many lights inside the chamber; but on the other hand it is due to only one light reflecting on the semi-precious stones embedded in the walls.

soft bed — The bed is so soft that one will fall asleep even if determined not to. The Gopis think:— “Is the bed so comfortable as to assuage even the agony due to the separation from Śrī Kṛṣṇa? How is it that you are sleeping soundly on the soft-bed, when we find such similar beds to be like beds of thorns due to the agony of separation from our beloved.”

Auntie Dear! Won't you awaken her? — Finding that the gopi did not arise after hearing her friends calling outside, her mother went near her bed and said:— ‘your friends are calling you! Get up at once and open the door’. Hearing the voice of the mother inside the chamber, the Gopis addressed her immediately encouraging her in her efforts at arousing her daughter.

O Lord of Maya! O Madhava! O Lord of Vaikunta! — ‘Lord of Maya’ denotes Kṛṣṇa's attribute of ‘*saṁlabhya*’ — accessibility. Gracious condescension to mingle with the lowest of the low; and ‘*Vaikuntan*’ denotes His ‘*paratvam*’ — transcendence as the Supreme Godhead. The intermediate term ‘*Madhavan*’ denotes that He is the Lord of ‘*mā*’ or Lakṣmi. From this it is clear that the Lord has ‘accessibility’ and ‘transcendence’ due to His inseparable relationship with Lakṣmi, the mediatrix of all grace.

He is *Mādhava* not only as the Lord who captivated the hearts the ordinary cow-maids of the Gokula, who could not distinguish between their right and left hands, but He is the Lord who has captivated the heart of Lakṣmi Herself, who dwells eternally upon His chest, never separated from Him, forming a part and parcel of Himself.

Esoteric Purport

“O Cetana! the beloved object of the Lord! You have a beautiful form; your face beams with intelligence and your behaviour is perfectly agreeable. We are overjoyed to see you, for you make no effort of your own towards Liberation but depend entirely upon the Lord. We pray to you to redeem us from our possessiveness (*mamākāra*) and to guide us along the lines of your spiritual practice; but still you turn a deaf ear to our entreaties. (Then turning to Goddess Lakṣmi) — ‘O Mother of the Universe! Can you not compel this qualified devotee (*adhikāri*) to teach us the way of surrender (*prapatti*)? Can you not make her reply to our entreaties? Has she completely immersed herself in *bhagavat viśaya* with complete disregard for worldly affairs? or has she attained complete mystical absorption (*samādhi*) in her meditation. We sing the glories of the Lord as — ‘He that is easily accessible, that He is the consort of Śrī or Lakṣmi, and that He is All-Supreme. We chant His names and laud his auspicious attributes (*kalyāṇa guṇas*). Please, for the time being, arouse her from her meditation to join us, for only in the company of such a superior devotee will we be able to fulfill our vow successfully.”

This verse refers to Tirumalisai Āḷvār. This is inferred from the address ‘cousin’, *māmān mahale* which indicates a relationship between Śrī Āṇḍāl and Tirumalisai Āḷvār. Śrī Āṇḍāl is an Avatāra of Lakṣmi as Śrī Vedānta Deśikan claims in his Godā Stuti, *Kamalāmi vanyām Godām* and Lakṣmī is said to be born in Bhṛgu clan according to the Purāṇas and the Amarakośa, and that is why she is called *bhārgavi*. Tirumalisai Āḷvār was also born in the Bhṛgu clan and hence one can easily posit a relationship between the two.

With the lamps blazing all around — denotes that the Lord residing in the heart of this Āḷvār was made visible to others like a thing kept inside an emerald-case. It also denotes his profound spiritual insight. This Āḷvār studied Sankhya, Buddhist, Saivite and other systems of

Philosophy and was well-versed in all of them.

Auntie Dear! Won't you awaken her? — Tirumalisai Āḷvār had sat down on the veranda of a brahmin's house to take rest. Some other brahmins nearby seeing him as a Sudra stopped chanting the Vedas. Realising this, the Āḷvār rose and took his seat a little distance away. When the brahmins wished to resume chanting they had all forgotten where they had left off. The Āḷvār helped them to remember the verse by nipping a variety of black paddy with his nail (*kṛṣṇanām vṛhīnām nakha-nirbhinnam*). They fell at his feet begged his pardon.

Dumb or deaf, — When he was insulted for receiving the Agra-pūjā at the yāga performed by the Brahmins of Perumbuliyur, he turned a deaf ear to their insults.

O Lord of Maya! O Madhava! O Lord of Vaikunta — These three expressions the favourites with this Āḷvār. Hence, it may be taken that a girl possessing the characteristics of Tirumalisai Āḷvār is being awakened in this verse. The Jiyar School agrees.

☀ Stanza 10

nōttuc cuvarkkum puhukinna ammanāy!
 mātṭamum tārārō vācal tiravādār ? |
 nāṭṭa tuzhāi muḍi nārāyaṇan | nammāl
 pōṭṭa paṛai tarum puṇṇiyanāl | paṇḍoru nāl
 kūttattin vāy vīzhnda kumbha karuṇanum |
 tōttum unakkē perunduyil tān tandānō ? |
 āṭṭa anandal uḍaiyāy! arungalamē! |
 tēttamāy vandu tiṛa vēlōr empāvāy ||

*With fasting and prayer you would gain heaven
 But will you open neither the door nor your mouth ?
 If we praise Lord Nārāyaṇa adorned with the tulsi on His head
 He will surely bless us with His drum.
 Has Kumbhakarna, killed in days of yore by Lord Rama
 transferred to you his sleep everlasting; vanquished, but
 in his sleep alive ? O Lazy One! Our precious jewel !
 Shake off your stupor and open the door.*

Commentary

This verse is addressed to a Gopi who is deeply immersed in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness (*Kṛṣṇānubhava*). The 'sleep' of this Gopi is really deep meditation on Kṛṣṇa and the help of such a person is required to complete the vow. Such a devotee is required to help the others to open the door and gain access to Kṛṣṇa.

The address in the vocative case found in the first line denotes that she was able to enjoy Kṛṣṇānubhava in this birth, because of the merit that she had accumulated in her previous birth. So she need not do any penance in this birth to attain divine bliss.

But will you open neither the door nor your mouth? — Is there any rule that people who do not open their doors should not even condescend to reply? — The Arayirappadi says “We have lost the benefit of our eyes and ears. By your not deigning to reply, we have lost the benefit of hearing your sweet voice; by your not rising up from bed to open the latch, we have lost the benefit of seeing your graceful gait.”

Lord Nārāyaṇa adorned with the tulsi — The Gopis refer to crown of Tulasi only when they arrived before the house of this particular Gopi, and so the sentiment (*bhāvam*) is that

though Kṛṣṇa was not inside, at that time, perhaps He might have visited during the previous night due to the lingering smell of Tulasi. The Tulasi is a symbol of Protection of the Universe (Loka-samrakṣana).

Has Kumbhakarna, ... — in these lines we find humour (*hāsya rasa*). Kumbhakarna is the brother of Rāvana who desired to attain the throne of Indra, the king of heaven (*Indrāsana*) but by a slip of the tongue (*nidrāsana*) was granted everlasting sleep — arising only once in 6 months to eat. And so Āṇḍāl says — “Kumbhakarna is renown for his perennial sleep, but O girl! You have vanquished him in the sleep-contest! Perhaps he might have endowed you with his great sleep also, in recognition of your merit! At least Kumbhakarna would wake up every six months, but it seems that you do not even have such a discipline!”

Even single moment of separation from the object of love, or delay in being united with the beloved will torment one like a month of separation. Furthermore Kumbhakarna's sleep was implicated in the separation of only one girl — Sītā from her beloved Rāma, because if he had been awake he would have counseled Rāvana against the abduction. Whereas your sleep prolongs the separation of five hundred thousand Gopis from Śrī Kṛṣṇa!

This phrase also hints that Kumbhakarna fell prey to the arrows of Rāma due to his own folly, like one who commits suicide by leaping into a tank dug for drinking purposes. Rāma recognising Kumbhakarna to be a potential devotee, wanted to win him over by sending Vibhīṣana to persuade him to join them.

Esoteric Purport

“O Swamin! who intends to attain the goal through karma-yoga and worship, though you are not gracious enough to give us audience and to redeem us from our *ahaṁkāra*, can't you even impart one word of guidance so that we may be blessed. If we prostrate at the feet of Nārāyaṇa he will surely satisfy our desires and grant us the goal of our existence (*puruṣārtha*). O Swamin! the radiance of your Self has dispelled the darkness of 'tamo guna' the cause of Nescience (*ajñāna*), and you are deeply absorbed in your self-realisation (*ātmānubhavam*). Yet we consider you still to be caught in *māya*, because you should try to enlighten us as well, by instructing us in the doctrines (*tattvas*). You are the most advanced and perfected devotee among us. Please join us and bless us so that our vow may be successful.”

The Gopi awakened in this verse possesses the characteristics of Peyāḷvar. This Āḷvār first experienced the beatitude of the Lord, in the light kindled by Poigai Āḷvār and Bhuttatāḷvar and called out in ecstasy. Hence, being the first to be so fortunate in obtaining the Grace of the Lord he is entitled to be called jewel of our group (*arungalame*). Not opening the door can be taken as an indication of Peyāḷvar because he had no opportunity to open the door at meeting in Tirukkoilur, as he was the last to enter and none came after him. Peyāḷvar's favourite theme in his poems was the scent of Kṛṣṇa's tulasi garland.

The Jiyar School infer that the Āḷvār hinted at is Kulaśekhara from the expressions '*anandal uḍaiyāy*' and '*tēṇṇamāy vandu*', Kulaśekhara ordered his troops to muster to go to the aid of Rāma in the construction of the bridge to Lanka and the great war, without realising that Rāma lived many centuries before him. Further '*ammanāy*' denotes hegemony and the name 'Kulaśekhara' is synonymous with "the crest-jewel of the family of devotees"

According to Guru Paramparai it is held that Periya Nambi is wakened in this verse. Śrī Parāṅkuśa dasa. Periya Nambi (Māhāpūrṇa) one of the five ācāryas of Śrī Rāmānuja is also known as Parāṅkuśadāsa.

☀ Stanza 11

kattu kaṇavai kaṇaṅgaḷ pala kaṇandu |
 cettār tiṛaḷ azhiya cennu ceruceyyum |
 kuttam onnillādā kōvalartam poṛkoḍiyē |
 puttaravalgul puna mayilē! pōdāray |
 cuttattu tōzhimār ellārum vandu | nin
 muttam puhundu muhil vaṇṇan pēr pāḍa |
 cittādē pecādē śelva peṇḍāṭṭi | nī
 ettukku uṛangam poruḷ ēlōr empāvāy ||

*O golden creeper of that clan of cowherds,
 expert milkmen of many young milch cows.
 Faultless, skilled warriors who rout their foes in open battle.
 O Charming peacock-like damsel! With hips like a snake's hood.
 Will you not come out and join us, when we
 your kinswomen and friends have entered your courtyard,
 And are chanting the praises of the Lord the colour of the rain-cloud.
 Wherefore now this sleep ? Rich maiden, immobile.*

Commentary

In this verse is awakened a Gopi who occupied the highest rank in all aspects. She is described as a creeper which indicates that she is a great devotee who is entirely dependant upon the Lord.

O golden creeper of that clan of cowherds,.... who rout their foes in open battle — (lines 1 to 3):— From these lines it is clear that the graziers are regularly engaged in their prescribed daily duties (*karmānuṣṭhāna*). One may ask that even after being so fortunate in having Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself in their midst, is it necessary for them to continue their daily duties (*nitya karmas*)? Even after having the darśan of the Lord Himself one should never abandon one's *nitya karmas*. The *nitya karma* of the Gopis is milking and tending the cows.

Esoterically the cows represent the Vedas and the allied Scriptures. The cowherds are the preceptors who milk the essence of the Scriptures in the form of milk and succour the devotees through this. Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself is the greatest of the preceptors.

rout their foes in open battle: — The verb use 'to go out' indicates that they would not wait till their enemies fell upon them, but they themselves would boldly go to their camps to fight with them. This shows the heroism of the graziers. The metaphorical 'enemies' are the various desires for sense gratification and the Vedas have to be protected against these.

Faultless, skilled warriors — This phrase denotes a faultless and righteous battle — one fought observing all the rules of war. Rāma in the Kamba Rāmāyaṇa prior to the great battle announces:— “Let all the cows, the peace-loving Brahmins, the women, the sick, and those that have no children to perform the obsequial rites depart the city; for I am about to commence the attack”.

O Charming peacock-like damsel! With hips like a snake's hood; — This description by members of her own sex reveals that she was indeed the most beautiful among the village women. The Arayirappadi says:— “even females crave to become males because of her beauty”. Here one is reminded of Kamban's words that — “the minds of both males and females run in the same direction,” (Due to Lord Rāma's physical beauty).

The expression *puṛṇaravu* denotes that she is absolutely chaste, for so long as the cobra is

underground in its abode its hood will not be smeared with dust or dirt. This comparison of her hips to the hood of a serpent indicates the great yogic powers that she possesses (*kuṇḍalini śakti*).

Addressing her as a ‘peacock’ connotes three ideas:—

- (a) as a peacock adds to the beauty of a garden, you must join us and beautify our company.
- (b) The thick hair on your head, resembling the peacocks tail makes us, as well as Śrī Kṛṣṇa mad with love and appreciation.
- (c) The allusion to the peacock stresses her spiritual knowledge which can destroy the material limitations represented by the snake to which the peacock has natural enmity.

O golden creeper!, O peacock!, O rich maiden immobile! — These three epithets denote respectively that the girl belongs to a highly respectable family, that she is a paragon of beauty and that she is an embodiment of good character.

Esoteric Purport

“O qualified one! (*adhikāri*) who thinks that Īśvara is the only means (*upāya*) and goal (*upeya*)! Please awake! O ācārya! who imparts knowledge to suitable disciples according to their competency and who removes ego, selfishness and other such faults by preaching the Dharma. O You who are deeply immersed in devotion (*bhakti*) towards the Supreme Self (*paramātmā*) residing in the midst of the vast sky (*ākāśa*)! You must come out and join our company. The pure devotees (*bhāgavatāras*) who serve only Lord Kṛṣṇa are standing in front of your house, calling you to join them while chanting the glories of Kṛṣṇa. O great one! who possesses the wealth of meditation! Why are you silent? Please deign to join us so that our intended vow will be successful.”

The girl awakened here is of the nature of Bhutālvar. The phrase '*kuṛṇam onṇillādā kōvalar*' applies to all the three first Ālvārs in that they were not born like mortals.

O golden creeper — This fits in well with him, as he styles himself as a creeper in the verse, Irandaṁ Tiruvandadi, 27.

rouṭ their foes in open battle — This Ālvār wanted to conquer the hearts of the enemies of the Lord wherever they may be, by instruction and guidance as stated in the verse Irandaṁ Tiruvantādi, 14.

The Jiyar School holds the view that the Gopi mentioned resembles Periyālvar. Periyālvar is considered to be an 'amśam' of Garuḍa who is the insignia in the banner of Lord Viṣṇu. So 'Porkodi' denotes 'Garuḍadhvaja' and Garuḍa possesses a gold-colour. Besides, Periyālvar hoisted the Garuḍa banner in the Pāṇḍyan court after establishing the superiority (*parattvam*) of Nārāyaṇa. The first three lines support this conjecture. This Ālvār mastered the quintessence of the Vedas and then under the direction of the Lord, went of his own accord bravely to the Pāṇḍyan court, where his antagonists had assembled and after a faultless argumentative debate won a tremendous victory for Vaiṣṇavism. Further the expression 'faultless' suits him quite well; for when the lord appeared before him, Periyālvar instead of asking for some personal reward began to pray for the Lord's welfare by exclaiming “Blessings, blessings on you, O mighty One, who didn't overcome the Mallas! Infinitely blest be the beauty of Your holy feet for many many years, for thousands of years, for millions of years, for evermore!” so this benediction (*maṅgalāsāsanam*) denotes that he is faultless.

Then the word wealthy for Periyālvar refers to the glory of singing benedictions to Bhagavan

Himself; furthermore he also enjoys the wealth of possessing Śrī Āṇḍāl as his daughter and thereby having the Lord Himself as his son-in-law. Further the expression 'Pendatti' fits in well for this Ālvār, for like the gopis of Vraja he was deeply engrossed in Kṛṣṇa-prema.

According to Guru Paramparai, Yamunācārya is awakened in this stanza.

☀ Stanza 12

kannaittilaṅ katterumai kannuk kiṛaṅgi |
 ninaittu mulai vazhiyē ninnu pāl cōra |
 nanaittillam cērākkum naṭ celvan tangāy |
 pani talay vīzhanin vāśal kaḍai patti |
 cinattināl ten ilangai kōmānai cetta |
 manattukkiniyānai pāḍavum nī vāy tiṛavāy |
 inittān ezhundirāy itenna pēr uṛakkam |
 anait-illat tārūm aṇḍēlōr empāvāy ||

*Sister of that prosperous cowherd; whose buffaloes
 yearning for their calves bellow and drip milk.
 The floor turned into a mire from the flow.
 Standing here at your door, unmindful of our
 heads soaked with the morning dew,
 We sing the praises of the Lord of our hearts, Rama
 who in wrath slew the king of Lanka, yet you're silent!
 Kindly arise now! The neighbours are scandalised.*

Commentary

Sister of that prosperous cowherd ; — This line indicates that this Gopi is one who never leaves the company of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

yearning for their calves bellow and drip milk — If the buffalo had been milked at the proper time, there is no necessity for it to bellow and to allow the milk to pour from the udder.

The floor turned into a mire from the flow. — Indicates that the house is flooded and rendered wet and slushy by the milk pouring from the udders of the young she-buffalo, who thinks of her calf and out of the fullness of her natural love lets the milk flow steadily out at the mere thought, even without any human agency

who in wrath slew the king of Lanka: — This expresses the idea that Rāma never wanted to kill Rāvana whole-heartedly but was provoked by unabated anger. This anger arose due to Rāvana's torturing of Hanumān who was a pure devotee. The Lord will never ignore an offence against a devotee. Furthermore, anger for a righteous cause is considered to be a good quality befitting a heroic ruler

We sing the praises of the Lord of our hearts, — this expression has two interpretations:

- (1) He is the dear one to his friends and neutrals, and
- (2) He is the dear one even to his very enemies.

Examples

1. **Dear to the Sages**; — as soon as the Rishis on the banks of the Ganges saw Rāma they rushed to welcome him, singing his glory, dancing in glee, and drank in his beauty.
2. **Dear to his subjects**; — they loved Him more than food and drink, and even life

itself. Secondly his very name 'Rāma' is most delightful and very dear to every one's heart. There is no mantra more beneficial than the name Rāma made up of only two syllables.

3. **Dear to Śūrpanaka:** — When the demoness Śūrpanaka was bleeding profusely after having lost her nose, ear, etc., she cried out "O after all, what loss have I suffered in losing my nose. To have a long protruding nose is unbefitting a fair maiden." She then continued — "O hero; I know why you have amputated my nose; by so doing you are indicating that a paragon of beauty, will never leave you and will always remain at your side; moreover, you have mutilated me so that no one else will look at me with eyes of love, with such intentions you have not wronged me, and my love for you is only increased and strengthened".

When Śūrpanaka described the beauty of Sītā in detail to Rāvana, it was so realistic that he saw an illusory vision of Sītā standing before him and at once, called for Śūrpanaka and cried out: — "O girl! Is this the Sītā that you have just now referred to, who stands before me like a peacock, with eyes as cruel and curved as a scythe, smeared with collyrium? (Marican vaday stanza;148) Śūrpanaka, replied "This is that Rāma, the valiant archer, who comes like a hill of collyrium with lotus red eyes, purple lips, broad shoulders, long arms and broad chest." (Marican vaday stanza.149) She had lost awareness of where she was and to whom she was replying, being aroused so much in the illusory vision of Rāma which always haunted her.

4. **Dear to Vali:** — With Rāma's arrow piercing his chest, and on caught in the throes of death Vali, began to abuse Rāma who stood in front of him. But as he was about to expire he became very composed and rational, addressed Rāma as his saviour:—

"You gave me real wisdom at the time of my death, by shooting me; your arrow was my preceptor; (just as your foot became the ācārya to Kaliyan). I have now, understood you properly; you are the Trinity: you are the Supreme Godhead; you are in all things and all things are in you; what a paradox — sin and dharma, enmity and friendship!"

5. **Dear to Rāvana:** — In the first day's battle Rāvana was thoroughly defeated by Rāma and he returned to Lanka downcast, rankling over his defeat. He went straight to Maliyavan and told him about Rāma's prowess and other qualities and concluded by saying "At the time of my downfall, I have at last met a good and befitting adversary". The evil Rāvana says good adversary — (nalla tor pagay). That is because of the impeccable personality of Rāma and the exhibition of his valour.

6. **Dear to Mandodari:** — Instead of being enraged at the one who killed her husband, Mandodari, the paragon of chastity began to praise Him. (Rāvanan vaday stanza.245)

In the Nacciyaṛ Tiru-mozhi we come across the following line; —

"We sing of the glories of the righteous one (*dharmātma*) Rama, not that of Kṛṣṇa, the thief. "

We sing the glories of one who pined in grief for the loss of his wife, suffered many hardships for her sake, eating roots, herbs, and leaves of trees, and not that of Kṛṣṇa who always danced in glee, after filling his stomach with butter, curd, and other edibles not caring for a moment about the hunger of his play-mates! Again, we sing of the glories of one who had undergone untold suffering for the sake of his consort, and not of one who makes the girls of the Gokula weep disconsolately!

Kindly arise now! — 'What is the meaning of this deep slumber?' — Sleep is of two kinds:— Worldly (*Laukika*) sleep — that which is common to all beings, due to the '*tamo*

guna', and Yogic sleep — like that of Viṣṇu on the serpent couch in the Milky Ocean. Though outwardly He may seem to be sleeping, yet He is continually mindful of His protecting duty and is eternally contemplating the protection of all the worlds. The girls say;— 'your sleep is peculiar — it doesn't fit in with either of them, *laukika* or *yogic* sleep'. Even the Bhagavān when immersed in *yoga nidra* arises immediately if He hears any one summoning him; like in the story of Gajendra.

The neighbours are scandalized — 'every one in every house has long ago arisen' — If you intend to boost your reputation by making us assemble in front of your house, the least you can do is to come out.

Here Periya Acchān Piḷḷai compares Āṇḍāl to Rāmānuja, for everyone realised the greatness of Śrī Rāmānuja when he openly gave the secret mantras to all at Tiru-koṭṭiyūr

The question of the continuation of one's social and professional duties once again is taken up with this stanza. Should one abandon one's personal duties (*sva-dharma*) or family obligations (*kula-dharma*) simply because one has surrendered to the Lord ? Tirumalisai Āḷvār says:—

" *Tozhil enakkut-tollai māl tan nāmam ēttap pozhudenakku maṛṇaduvē pōdum*".
(*Nānmugan Tiruvantāḍi*, 85).

"It is my duty is to sing the names of Tirumāl and I can't afford to spend my time in any other way".

Thus in the previous stanzas, '*karmānuṣṭhānam*' or doing one's duty is stressed, here the emphasis is on doing '*Bhagavat Kainkaryam*' or service to the Lord, even at the expense of one's social duties.

We find yogis immersed in yoga for many many years, meditating on the Lord and thus doing service to him. During this period they may not be able to fulfill their *nitya karmas*; still no sin is incurred. But after they come out of their yogic meditation, they will do their *nitya karmas* as usual. One should never swerve from one's duties: and even if by any chance or force of circumstances, one has to suspend their performance awhile, they should be renewed again as soon as possible.

Nañjiyar once told Piḷḷai Tirunaraiyur Araiyaṛ that abandoning one's religious, social and professional obligation (*svadharma anuṣṭhānam*) is not a sure way to attain the Lord, and too much adherence to *svadharma anuṣṭhānam* is also not a sure guide either. The reliable guide is the Lord Himself, for it is He who knows how to attach us to Himself by relieving us of our *svadharma*. Those duties which have been prescribed by the Śāstras should always be adhered to.

Esoteric Purport

“O Swamin! rise up now. You are the sibling of the great ācārya by whose grace his disciples are able to enjoy Lord Kṛṣṇa's presence. Though the enjoyment of the qualities of the Lord and his devotees detract us from doing service unto you, yet we are able to surmount them and stand before your presence awaiting your grace. We have uprooted the 'ego' in us, which is responsible for our cycle of births and deaths and we are singing the glories of Rāma. In spite of this, you do not arise. What kind of sleep is this? If it is the common sleep of humans, you should have awoken by now because it is morning: if it is a sleep like Viṣṇu's, it should have dissipated the moment we called out to you. O Swamin! you are quite aware that *Bhagavat Guṇa-anubhava* is not a secret practice so please come and join us so that our *Kainkarya nonbu* may end successfully.”

The gopi that is awakened in this verse is likened to Poigai Āḷvār. The term of address *tangāy*

is most applicable, in that Poigai Āḷvār was born in the lotus, like Lakṣmī.

nanaittillam cērākkum — this expression denotes that Poigai Āḷvār wept over his past days - Mudal Tiruvandāḍi, 16.

kannaittu — This is also applicable to Poigai Āḷvār, because he was the first to sing about Viṣṇu.

kanṛuk kiṛaṅgi — This Āḷvār sang the verses for our sake out of pure grace.

pani talay vīzha — this indicates he was born in the lotus in a tank, open to wind and rain, and dew.

The Jiyar School is of the view that this verse refers to Toṇḍaraḍip-poḍi Āḷvār. The first line of this stanza contains a reference to buffaloes and so also Toṇḍaraḍippoḍi Āḷvār referred to buffaloes in his composition *Tiruppallezhucci* — the Hymn of Awakening. The expression *manattukkiniyānai pāḍavum nī vāy tiṛavāy* hints to the fact that at first the Āḷvār was deeply obsessed with worldly love and sex and later was roused from this stupor by the grace of God.

According to Guru Paramparai, Manakkāl Nambigaḷ (Rāma-miśra) is awakened — accordingly we find Rāma's story referred to in lines 5 and 6.

☀ Stanza 13

pullin vāy kiṇḍānaip pollārakkanai |
 kiḷḷi kalaindānaik kīrtimai pāḍi pōy |
 piḷḷaigaḷ ellārum pāvai kaḷam pukkār |
 velliy ezhundu viyāzham uṇṅittu |
 pullum cilambina kān pōḍāri kaṇṇināy! |
 kuḷḷa kuḷira kuḍaindu nīrādādē |
 palli kiḍattiyō? pāvāy! nī nannālāl |
 kaḷḷam tavirndu kalandu ēlōr empāvāy ||

*All the girls have reached the meeting ground,
 They went, singing the praise of the One who Killed Bakasura.
 The One who decapitated the Demon King Ravana.
 Venus has arisen and Jupiter has already set.
 Look! the birds are chirping away, O lotus and doe-eyed one!
 Will you forego the dip in the freezing waters and
 lie abed and sleep? Dear girl, on this auspicious day
 kindly leave off your aloofness, don't lie there, join us!*

Commentary

Here Godā and her growing crowd of companions try to awaken another gopi who has already experienced God-realisation and subsequent bliss. Since then she has remained aloof from the other devotees shunning their association. The general sentiment is — just as all the gopis have gathered at the meeting place singing the glory of Kṛṣṇa, so also, you are probably lying abed contemplating His glory.

All the girls — denotes that girls, younger in age than you, have already arisen from their beds and when such be the case, is it proper that you should still be lounging around?

have reached the meeting ground: — This is the place where the deity Kātyāyāni or Durgā made of sand is consecrated. It is here that all the girls are expected to assemble to perform the worship.

the One who Killed Bakasura — The incident from Kṛṣṇa's life alluded to here is the killing of the demon Bakasura who appeared in the form of a crane. Lord Kṛṣṇa gave battle and subsequently tore him apart. The crane in Sanskrit literature represents hypocrisy and the cheating potential.

Demon King Ravana — Like Yama who separates life from the body, so also this demon separated the beautiful Sītā from Rāma and so he was termed 'wicked'.

Furthermore, the expression 'demon king' connotes that there must be a 'godly king' and also the expression 'killing of the wicked king' denotes 'protecting the good king. Vibhīṣana is the good king and he is referred to as '*dharmātma*' — a pious Self in Vālmiki Rāmāyana by Śūrpanaka.

Venus has arisen and Jupiter has already set — Venus is the planet which presides over love whereas Jupiter is the presiding deity of spiritual knowledge. So Godā here indicates that the pangs of love for Kṛṣṇa are welling up and the dry spiritual knowledge is receding into the sub-conscious.

This astronomical reference was used by research scholars like Mr. L. D. Swamikanu Piḷḷai and Rao Saheb M. Raghava Iyengar. Accordingly they have determined the date of Śrī Aṇḍāl as the first half of the 8th century C.E.

Look! the birds are chirping away: — This same symbol has been already quoted in verse 6 and as such is that not redundant? The answer is that in verse 6 the expression meant the chirping of birds in their nests; here it means the chirping of birds in places where they have gone in search of their food.

O lotus and doe-eyed one! — this can mean 'eyes resembling the kuvalai flower' and the 'eyes of the deer'. But if we take '*ari*' to mean a bee, then it means "one who possesses eyes resembling the black bee sitting on a kuvali flower."

Esoteric Purport

“O Swamin! who has attained God-realisation! please wake up from your bed and join us. The Bhāgavatas have already reached the hall of culture, singing about the qualities of that Lord who destroys the six afflictive emotions (*ariṣaṭ varga*);— *kāma* (selfish desire), *krodha* (anger) *lobha* (greed), *moha* (delusion), *mada* (arrogance) and *mātsarya* (envy/malice) and the ego in us. Consequently ignorance has vanished and sublime knowledge dawned. Other Bhāgavatas have quickly assembled, and it is not proper on your part to contemplate the Lord's qualities alone in solitude. As the day is quite auspicious, you should abandon this mental isolation, and come forth and join us so that our vow may be successfully.”

Some scholars opine that the girl awakened in this verse is Toṇḍaraḍippoḍi Āḷvār. In the vocative expression *pōḍāri kaṇṇināy* the word '*ari*' refers to the plucking out of flowers and as such there is a reference to the flower-service rendered by Toṇḍaraḍippoḍi Āḷvār to the Lord.

kuḷḷa kuḷira kuḍaindu ...kiḍattiyō? — This phrase refers to the time when this Āḷvār had abandoned his kainkaryā for sometime when he had fallen in love with the courtesan and was cultivating her association.

The Jiyar School holds the view that this Gopi resembles Tiruppānālvar. The reference to the beauty of the eyes (*Podarik-kaninay*) in this verse is also referred to by this Āḷvār in his Amalanādhīpīrān. According to Guru Parampara Uyyakkoṇḍār, also known as '*Puṇḍarikākṣam*' is awakened.

☀ Stanza 14

ungal puzhai kaḍai tōṭṭattu vāviyuḷ |
 cengazhunīr vāy nehizhndu āmbal vāy kūmbina kāṇ |
 cengal poḍi kūṟai veṇpal tavattavar |
 tangaḷ tiru kōyil śangiḍuvān pōhinnār |
 engalāi munnam ezhuppuvān vāy pēcum |
 nangāy! ezhundirāy! nāṇādāy nāvudaiyāy |
 śankoḍu cakkaram ēndum taḍakkaiyin |
 pangaya kaṇṇānai pāḍēlōr empāvāy ||

*Look in your back-yard pools, already the day is dawning,
 The red lotuses have bloomed and the blue lilies closed.
 The ascetics in their saffron robes and white teeth,
 Have gone to their temple to blow their conches.
 You boasted that you would awaken before us.
 Shameless braggart, get up, girl, you adroit talker!
 Let us sing the glory of the Lotus-eyed Lord who holds aloft
 The Conch and Discus in His mighty hands!*

Commentary

In this verse is awakened a very eloquent Gopi who is one of the ring leaders of the group. This girl is one who bragged the day before that she would wake up first in order to awaken the others. This Gopi is very spiritually advanced because unlike the maidens in the previous stanzas this one is referred to in the plural form which denotes great respect.

The red lotuses have bloomed and the blue lilies closed — Even in the big pool in your back-yard, the red lotus has opened its buds and the blue lily has closed its buds. The lotus blooming in the light of dawn is the symbol of spiritual unfoldment and the folding night lilies symbolize the suppression of the senses and of ignorance.

The ascetics in their saffron robes and white teeth, Have gone to their temple to blow their conches. — Here one should note that at the opening of the doors of the temple, the conches are blown for good augury. The reference to white teeth denotes that these sanyāsis don't chew betel. The conches announce the beginning of the spiritual dawn of enlightenment.

You boasted that you would awaken before us — 'O perfect lady who bragged yesterday' — The expression 'naṅgāy' (perfect lady) is taken as sarcasm.

Shameless braggart — You should be ashamed of yourself that yesterday you bragged about waking us up first. The terms "shameless braggart" and "adroit talker" are not used in an abusive sense but out of deep affection and familiarity.

you adroit talker — having a sharp tongue, an adept in bragging —

(a) that is, you say one thing and do another; you never act according to your word and it is due to your fault of cultivating intimacy with that Kṛṣṇa, who like His serpent has two tongues (i.e.,) saying one thing and doing another.

(b) Again, the expression means 'having a sweet tongue and a fascinating speech excelling others'.

The Conch and Discus in His mighty hands — The *cakrāyudha* (the discus) is intended for destroying His enemies and the '*saṅkha*' (conch) for the announcement of the commencement of battle. But, for His Bhaktas, both these weapons will be a source of delight. Note, for example, the sound of His conch struck terror in the hearts of his enemies during the

Mahābhārata war and the chakra guarded his devotee Arjuna from the deadly arrows of Bhishma. So these weapons will seem deadly to enemies and will be ornaments to devotees.

Esoteric Purport

“O Mediatrix between the Lord and ourselves! please arise: you are the repository of knowledge; for in you the '*para-tantriyam*' (dependence upon God) denoted by the middle word '*namah*' in the Tirumantram became manifest, and the '*sva-tantriyam*' (self-dependence) dissolves. Those who have a knowledge of service to the Lord (*śeṣatva-jñāna*) and who want to attain their desires, have gone to their respective temples to worship the Lord. Even before we expressed our desire, you, out of your profound grace, desired our enlightenment, and made a statement to that effect. Are you not bound to act according to your declarations? If you don't, it will bring you shame. O, adroit speaker, even īśvara is captivated by your speech! come and join us and let us all sing about Lord Kṛṣṇa, who bears the weapons of Cakra and śaṅkha in his hands and who has lotus-eyes. He will see that our vow is successful.”

In this verse is awakened a girl resembling Tiruppan-āḷvār. Here all the three expressions *nangāy*, *nāṇādāy*, *nāvuḍaiyāy* are applicable to him.

nangāy — denotes the perfection of qualities; hence Lord Raṅganātha could order the Sage Loka Sāraṅga to bring the Āḷvār (a śūdra) on his shoulders into His temple? The Āḷvār without heSītāting even a little, mounted up on the shoulders of the sage, because he had fully realised the '*Paratantriya svarūpa*' and herein lies the '*guṇa*' perfection.

nāṇādāy — denotes absence of ego (*Ahamkara*), and the Āḷvār had no Ahamkāra at all even when he was on the shoulders of a sage.

nāvuḍaiyāy — The adroit speech seen in his hymn Amalanādirān.

The Jiyar School holds the view that, in this verse the girl represents Nammāḷvar. The rational is that the sentiment expressed in this verse is of one who has not ventured much out of her house; so also, Nammāḷvar never stirred from the foot of the tamarind tree, where he first took his seat, immersed in transcendental bliss.

The words '*sengaluneer*' and '*ambal*' denote respectively wisdom and ignorance in *svapadeśārtha* and thus we can deduce, that the 'inner darkness' which cannot vanish before Aditya, the sun, disappeared in toto when the Vahulabūṣana Divākara began to shed its rays of Tiruvāymoli. Further, just as the Lord is said to reside in the midst of the sun, so also He resides in the heart of Nammāḷvar.

Moreover, just as the ambal flower closes its buds as soon as the sun makes its appearance, so also as soon as the name of Nammāḷvar is mentioned when reciting his Tiru-vāy-moli, everyone will close his hands in '*añjali*' in reverence to him.

The line *engaḷai munnam ezhuppuvān vāy pēcum* clearly refers to Nammāḷvar; Nammāḷvar occupies the first place in Disciplic Succession.

Śrī Vedānta Deśikan states that we have attained the lotus feet of the Lord through the grace of Nammāḷvar our chief and foremost guide. Moreover, he wanted to awaken others from the illusion of Samsāra, and began to preach to them about the essentials of His philosophy, but when he started preaching about the *saulubhya* (accessibility) of the Lord he was overcome and lost consciousness. He who had tried to enlighten others had to be awakened instead from this loss of body consciousness. Similarly, he fell unconscious enwrapped by the Lord's qualities.

According to Guru Parampara, Śrīman Nāthamuni is awakened in this verse. Through his adherence to yogic practices he attained enlightenment. Besides he was not ashamed (*nanday*) in the least to learn the Divya Prabandham under Nammāḷvar who belonged to the śūdra caste.

☀ Stanza 15

ellē iḷangkīḷiyē innum urangudiyō |
 cil ennazhaiyēnmin nangaimīr! pōdārkinnēn |
 vallaiyun kaṭṭuraigaḷ paṇḍēyun vāy aṇidum |
 vallīrgaḷ nīngalē nānēdān āyiḍuka |
 ollai nī pōḍāy unakkenna vēruḍaiyāi ? |
 ellārum pōndārō ? pōndār pōndeṇṇikol |
 vallānai konnānai mātṭārai mātṭazhikka
 vallānai | māyanai pāḍēlōr empāvāy ||

*Hello! tender young Parrot, yet sound asleep?
 Don't be so sharp and shrill in calling me Great Ladies, I am coming.
 We have known for long your promises and power of words.
 Clever you all are in verbal altercation, but let it be me!
 Come along quickly now, what restrains you ?
 Has everyone come already ? Yes, come out and be counted too.
 Let us sing about the Mysterious One, Who killed the mighty elephant,
 and Who would destroy the arrogance of His foes.*

Commentary

The Gopi awoken in this stanza is one that is truly advanced in devotional service. She is the last to be awakened and the verse is in the form of a conversation between her and the group that is standing outside. This verse enunciates the way in which one should conduct oneself regarding dealings with other devotees of the Lord. Godā mentions arrogance in the last line as a fault to be avoided at all costs. This is very important and that is why Alagiya Manavāḷap-perumal Naiyanār considered this as the central and most essential song of the entire Prabandham.

Hello! tender young Parrot, — The parrot symbolises absolute truthfulness as well as a melodious voice. The inferred context of this exchange is that Gopis had been rousing her neighbour (in Stanza 14) this young lady caught their last word (i.e., *Let us sing the glory of the Lotus-eyed Lord*) and began to sing in her melodious voice as she lay on her bed. The Gopis heard the delightful voice and moved towards it, exclaiming:— "Hello! tender young parrot!" This interrupted the gopi and she kept silent. The gopis continued — "Are you still sleeping"? With so many waiting outside to greet and honour you, how could you neglect us like this? or having obtained the best opportunity to seek the secret audience of the Lord could you fail to take advantage of it? The Gopi was so engrossed in contemplating the Lord that the other Gopis' words were harsh on her ears and she retorted;

Don't be so sharp and shrill in calling me Great Ladies, I am coming — the gopis were apparently stung to the quick and replied;—

We have known for long your promises and power of words — we are well acquainted with your barbed speech and skilful tongue! But she hastily retorted;—

Clever you all are in verbal altercation, but let it be me! — you are the truculent ones, not, I — but added a second thought, having reflected on it; — "so let it be me then".

Having been charged with barbed speech and skilful tongue this Gopi's first reaction was to retaliate, but having reflected a moment, she accepted the fault. This is the way of true devotees; to be so submissive that whenever anything goes wrong anywhere, they think it is all their own fault. Bhārata thought it was his own fault that drove Rāma to the forest. This sort of self-abnegation (*nīca bhāva*) is essential for a devotee. Herein lies the essence of Vaiṣṇava tattva and this sort of realisation is the essential attribute of a Vaiṣṇava.

When the Gopi inside the house said 'Let it be me', this reply subdued the others and they said — "*Come along quickly now, what restrains you ?*" The Gopi who was inside was aware of the eminence of the bhaktas and had only been waiting for all the gopis including the novices to gather together and therefore, questioned — "*Has everyone come already ?*" They answered — "*Yes, come out and be counted too.*" — the object of taking count being to mix with each and every individual and not merely with the gathering as a whole. And what was the object of all this?

Let us sing about the Mysterious One, Who killed the mighty elephant, and Who would destroy the arrogance of His foes. — Śrī Kṛṣṇa's demonic uncle Kamsa sent a mad elephant Kuvalayapīḍam to kill Him. Without any difficulty the elephant was dispatched by Kṛṣṇa as had the other demons that were sent before to kill Him. The expression *Who would destroy the arrogance of His foes* denotes that Kṛṣṇa won't let his enemies go unpunished, as Rāma had done in the case of Rāvana by saying; "You appear exhausted; go to-day and come to-morrow fully armed and refreshed for battle!" Kṛṣṇa on the other hand will smite them instantaneously. Such a mighty Lord behaves like a slave to the girls of Gokula, for many times has the Lord been manipulated by His true Bhaktas! — and this idea is brought out by the word 'māyanai'.

Esoteric Purport

"O Swamini! who is fully aware of the eminence of Kṛṣṇa's devotees! This is remarkable! Even after all of us have arisen early and assembled before your house, you are still lounging upon your couch? Please get up!" To this, she replied "Your words interrupt my meditation upon the Lord; so please be patient and wait for awhile I shall soon join you. "Having heard this reply, the devotees called out - "We already know that you are adroit in hiding the highest truths of philosophy!" and the Swamini retorted;— you have interrupted my absorption in God and you must appreciate the wrong done to me. But you never realised your own faults; never mind about it; anyhow service to Vaiṣṇavas is always my aim and as such, I am prepared to accept the blame.' Hearing this, they said;— "O Svamini leaving all these things, you must also now come out quickly to join us for it is not proper to engage in personal and secret devotion to the Lord." To this, she inquired;— "Have all the others assembled in the hall of service?" having confirmed this, she asked them;— "What is expected of me?", and they said;— "if you join us in our singing about Nārāyaṇa, the Lord, who dispelled the 'false ego' and who destroyed all the evil propensities (Kāma, krodha etc.) in us, our kainkarya nonbu will fructify successfully."

The Gopi in this verse resembles Tirumangai Āḷvār. This can be substantiated as follows:—

This Āḷvār has followed the argumentative method in the padigam "*Mānamarum mēl nōkki*" (Periya Tirumoli, 1-5) as if the altercation is between two Ayar girls, similar to the theme of this verse.

iḷangkīḷiyē — This expression can be fitting applied to this Āḷvār. This Āḷvār in his immortal Tiruneḍun-tāṇḍaham refers to the parrot in the verses stanza 13 and stanza 14 . The Āḷvār calls himself a parrot in Periya Tirumoli 3-7-2. Moreover, he repeated the substance of

Nammālvārs four works, in his six Prabandhas. Besides, the Ālvār possessed a beautiful personality, and so he was termed a parrot '.

innūm urangudiyē:— In the early stages of his life, Tirumangai Ālvār was steeped in ignorance and this can be inferred from his own declarations in his poems.

vallai un kaṭṭuraigaḷ— The word 'kaṭṭurai' means 'words pregnant with meaning and emphatic in their ideas'. Tirumangai Ālvār had sung such beautiful songs that he is termed popularly as *nālkavirāja perumāḷ* — (a master of the four kinds of Tamil verses). There is nothing to equal the sound and symphony of this Ālvār's compositions and that is why the expression '*kaliyan oli ceyda*' (Kaliyan rhythmically sang) is commonly found as contrasted with '*Kurugur Satagopan sonna*'— (Satagopan of Kurugur spoke). Moreover, whereas Nammālvār composed the ideas of the four Vedas in Tamil, Tirumangai Ālvār composed the six Vedāṅgas in beautiful Tamil verses.

Paṇḍē un vāy aṇḍum — "we know your harsh speech and skilful tongue" — This is also applicable to Tirumangai Ālvār. He waylaid the Lord Himself and showed Him his sword and at last gained from Him the Mahā-mantra 'oṃ namo nārāyaṇāya'. Further, He is one who cannot be limited to a restricted vocabulary of words or ideas. He will never obey words, but words will obey him.

ellārum pōndārō ? pōndār pōndu eṇṇikol — The feeling expressed in this line can also be fittingly attributed to Tirumangaiyār's wife. According to the directions from Kumudavalliyār, his wife, the Ālvār used to feed a thousand and eight Brahmins daily in his household, and it might so happen, that she could have asked him as to whether all the thousand-eight had turned up, and he could have retorted " All have come; if you so desire, you yourself can go over and count."

From the above elucidation, it is inferred that Tirumangai Ālvār is innately referred to in this verse. The Jiyar School is also of the same opinion. According to Guru Paramparai, it is Nammālvār that is wakened in this verse.

ATTAINMENT OF THE GOAL — Part C

(Pāsurams 16 to 30)

Now, we reach the third division of this Prabandham. The next seven verses from 16 to 22, deal with the Gopis arousing the intimate associates of Kṛṣṇa, like Nandagopa, Yaśoda, Baladeva, and Nappinnai and then Kṛṣṇa Himself.

In the two verses 16 & 17 Śrī Āṇḍāl reaffirms the vow she and the Gopis have taken. (Stanza 2) Śrī Āṇḍāl surrenders herself completely to the five 'Puruṣākāra-puthargal', (those who render help by interceding with God for us), and they are, in this case five persons,

- (1) the gate-keeper of the outer court (*koil-kāppān*),
- (2) the gate-keeper of the inner court (*vāsal-kāppān*)
- (3) Nandagopa,
- (4) Yaśoda
- (5) Baladeva.

Śrī Rāmānuja also took refuge with five ācāryas or gurus. The term *guru* indicates "a dispeller of the darkness of ignorance". The term *ācārya* refers to one who understands and practices the injunctions of the Scriptures; and teaches them to others through example.

Rāmānuja received *Samāśrayanam* (initiation) from Periya Nambigal, studied Rāmāyana under Tirumalai Nambi, learnt the Bhagavat Viśaya (theology) under Tirumalai āṇḍān, learnt the Rahasyārtha (secret meaning of the mantras) under Tirukkottiyūr Nambi, and studied the Tiru-vāi-moli under Tiruvaraṅgap-perumāl Araiyaṅ.

The ācārya is mediator, the manifest representation of God on earth, firm in faith and full of wisdom. He knows our temptations, our imperfections, and our frailties, by personal contact. The ācāryas do not care for our virtue or sin, if we surrender ourselves completely to them, they will by their precious and unceasing efforts procure salvation for us, more easily and with greater certainty and less risk, than would otherwise be possible.

Thus it is clear, that one attains the Lord through the help of the ācārya and obtaining a good (Sat) ācārya is due to the grace of the Lord. According to Vaiṣṇava Tradition Puruṣākāram or intercession and grace of the ācārya are the two essentials for the attainment of Salvation. Even a great prodigy like Alavandār surrendered himself to Lord Raṅganātha through the grace of his ācārya Natha-muniḡal. The gate-keepers are now in the position of ācāryas, and their permission and intercession is needed for the Gopis to attain the precious jewel — Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

☀ Stanza 16

nāyakanāy ninna nanda gopan uḍaiya
 kōyil kāppānē | koḍi tōnnum tōraṇa
 vāyil kāppānē | maṇi kadavam tāḷ tiravāy |
 āyar ciṟu miyarō mukku | aṟai paṟai
 māyan maṇivaṇṇan nennālē vāy nērndān |
 tūyōmāy vandōm tuyilezha pāḍuvān |
 vāyāl munna munnam mātādē ammā! nī
 nēya nilaik kadavam nīkku ēlōr empāvāy |

*O Guard of the mansion of Nanda our leader,
 O Keeper of the gate, with its flags and buntings flying aloft;
 Unbolt the latch of the gem-set doors
 Yesterday the charming Mysterious One of sapphire hue
 Promised us, the cow-maids that He would give us the drum.
 We have come pure in body and mind, to awaken Him with song.
 Pray do not hinder us, O Compassionate Guard,
 Open the giant twin gates and grant us access.*

Commentary

In this stanza, the Gopis approach Nandagopa's mansion and request the gate-keepers of the outer and inner courts to grant them entry. The opening of the door symbolises the opening of the hearts and the minds to receive God. The latch is the feeling of independence from God. It is removed when we realise our total dependence upon Him. When one enters the temples to worship the Lord, it is essential that one take the permission of the *kṣetrādhīpati* and gate-keepers or *Dvārapālakas*. The ill-directed attempts to reach the Lord independently, without the guidance, the help and the recommendation of His servants will prove futile and even dangerous.

O Guard of the mansion of Nanda — The gate-keepers are addressed as guardians of 'Nandagopa's mansion' and not 'Kṛṣṇa's mansion' because, they wanted to please Lord Kṛṣṇa

who had suffered much by being independent of others (*svatantram*) in Paramapada, and who desiring to experience dependence upon others (*paratantriyam*) was born as the son of Nandagopa in this mundane world.

our leader — This epithet can be applied not only to Nandagopa but also to the gate-keeper, because, it is only through the mercy of the gate-keeper, that we can enter the presence of the Lord. So in this way, the attribute can be applied to both Nandagopa and the gatekeepers for both act as *puruṣākāra* (mediators) to approach Kṛṣṇa.

O Keeper of the gate — The Gopis were much impressed with the good fortune of the gatekeepers in guarding the mansion of Nandagopa. In the exuberance of joy, they are addressed by their function rather than by name. Moreover, it is always respectful to address one by referring to one's occupation especially in doing service to the Lord.

with its flags and buntings flying aloft — serves to mark out Nandagopa's mansion to the various people, who are in need so that they may approach him for charity. Generous patrons who installed water-sheds in charity used to raise banners above them, so those that were thirsty might know even from a distance the situation and position of the water-sheds. The flags and buntings are also said to represent the jewel of all mantras om namo nārāyaṇāya

yesterday — Not like to-day when we have to prostrate at your feet for obtaining admittance. Also another meaning— Just as we have to prostrate before you to-day, yesterday we had to prostrate before Him to obtain a promise to give us the '*parai*'.

the charming Mysterious One of sapphire hue — Connotes his accessibility (*saṁlabhya*) and the term *maṇivaṇṇan* (of sapphire hue) His unsurpassable beauty. If His beauty was enough to make even males fall madly in love with Him, what can be said about these poor girls whose very existence was dependant upon His grace. Kṛṣṇa as the Mysterious One is said to be blue in colour. The deep blue of the sky and the sea which are in fact devoid of colour, appears due to the unfathomable depth. Because of His inscrutable nature Kṛṣṇa is described as being blue in colour.

Promised us, the cow-maids — We, naive folk of the Gokulam — This is a beautiful expression. We are not girls of the type of Śūrpanaka or Pūtana. After the Pūtana incident it was not easy to persuade the guardians of the Lord's mansion to believe in the good faith of even women, but the Gopis humbly told them of the previous arrangement with the Lord, who had agreed to give them the drum '*parai*'. They succeeded in convincing them of their innocence, purity of heart and purpose and were admitted.

Pray do not hinder us, O Compassionate Guard, — You seem to think something against our wishes — you are the first to be approached by us this morning; so do not start by refusing our request. In Tamil addressing the watchman as "mother" is an appeal to his compassion — many of the ācāryas are also entitled '*amma*' or more respectfully '*ammāl*'.

Open the giant twin gates and grant us access — In Gokula, even the inanimate doors are devoted to Kṛṣṇa and are madly in love with him. There may be some devotees who might have desired to be born as doors to His Temple and as such there is no possibility of a nearer approach to the Lord. So O gate-keeper! please open the doors and let us in.

Esoteric Purport

O Swamin! you are most blessed by your ācārya, himself the embodiment of servitude! And the mediator of your relationship with the Lord.

(then addressing another)

O Swamin! you learned the esoteric meanings of the Tirumantra from your ācārya and you are

now assisting us in the pursuit of liberation by transmitting those teachings to us! You must dispel our identification with the body (*ātma-svarūpānubhavam*) and reliance upon ourselves (*sva-svatantriyam*). We claim membership in a lineage of great and learned scholars who have fully realised that the Lord is both the means (*upāya*) and the goal (*upeya*). Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa has expressed explicitly in the Gita that He would satisfy the desires of one who takes refuge in Him. So, we have no other desire except to awaken Him; as you are our chief intercessor, we request you please not to refuse our request. Now help us to render service to Lord Kṛṣṇa at this proper time.

According to Guru Parampara this stanza and the next one are referring to Viṣvaksena who is the Chief Commander of the Lord's entourage.

☀ Stanza 17

ambaramē tannīrē cōrēyarañ ceyyum |
 emperumān nanda gopālā! ezhundirāy |
 kombanark-kellām kozhundē! kula viḷakkē!
 emperumāṭṭi! yaśoday! aṇivurāy |
 ambaram ūḍaruttōngiyulahaḷandu |
 umbar kōmānē! uṇṅād ezhundirāy!
 cembor kazhalaḍi celvā! baladevā!
 umbiyum nīyum uṇṅēlōr empāvāy ||

*Arise O Lord Nanda Gopa, who are so renown
 for generosity with cloth, water and food to the needy.
 Kindly wake up! O Yashoda, the foremost of womankind,
 the beacon light of our community of cow-herders.
 O Lord of the gods Who measured the three worlds,
 and pierced the sky, sleep no more! Arise!
 O Baladeva opulent with red-gold anklets,
 You together with your younger brother, sleep no more! Arise!*

Commentary



Periya Acchān Pillai comments that in the first quarter-portion of the bed-chamber, Nandagopa is sleeping, in the second quarter Yaśoda, in the third Kṛṣṇa and in the fourth Baladeva. Nandagopa is sleeping in the front-portion because, the girls may steal Kṛṣṇa away from him. A query was once raised whether girls can in fact steal males? and Periya Acchān Pillai drew attention to the story of Aniruddha. If such were to be the fate of Aniruddha, the grandson of Kṛṣṇa who was considered to be exquisitely beautiful, what about the beauty and fate of Kṛṣṇa Himself who was the paternal grandfather of such a paragon of beauty.

renown for generosity with cloth, water and food to the needy — from this line it is evident that out of the thirty-two kinds of righteous actions (Dharma) taught, the most important are — gifts of clothes, water and food. Food and clothing are the two essential requisites for every

human being and Nandagopa is charitable in both these necessities of life. Further, the expression '*aram ceyyum*' (giving charity) implies that he gives, not with an idea to gain recognition, but charity for charity's sake. Commentators liken Nandagopa to the preceptor. His gifts of clothing represent the entire universe the Supreme Self and the Supreme Abode itself. Water represents the faith that is needed to attain him. Food is knowledge and experience of God.

O Yashoda, the foremost of womankind— Yasoda! (lit. 'the tendril of womankind') — They addressed Yaśoda in this way because, if there is any disease in a plant, it is the tendril that withers at first, thus symbolising the impending danger to the plant; similarly, if any impending danger were to threaten the womenfolk of Gokula, then Yaśoda's face will be the first to fade.

O Lord of the gods Who measured the three worlds, and pierced the sky, — Here they refer to Vāmana Avatāra during which, the Lord laid his lotus feet on the heads of all without any discrimination whatsoever, even when not one of them had requested Him to do so. Now the Gopis intimate that they prostrate before Him and request that He take them into servitude and yet Kṛṣṇa is not moved.

O Baladeva opulent with red-gold anklets — They addressed Balarāmā as "*celva*!" (O wealthy one) because wealth for Baladeva is to render service to Kṛṣṇa; just as the wealth of service achieved by Lakṣmana by being born after Rāma is now achieved by Baladeva by being born before Kṛṣṇa.

You together with your younger brother, sleep no more — Balarāmā or Anantaśeṣa is a plenary expansion of the Lord Himself and is His eternal servant. Baladeva (Balarāmā) belongs to and exists solely for the pleasure of the Lord. In Vaikuṇṭha he serves as the couch of Nārāyaṇa. It is usual for people to sleep on beds, but it is surprising to see the bed itself sleeping!

Esoteric Purport

“O ācārya! You can prepare us for receiving the grace of the Lord, by removing our ego (*ahaṁkāra*) and thereby perfect us in devotional service (*kainkarya*), please come and join us.

O Tirumantra! you are the best among the mantras revealed by the Lord, for the upliftment of those in the ocean of transmigration. You must reveal your inner meanings to us so that we may attain enlightenment.

O Puruṣottama! who expanded and measured the world with two strides, thereby destroying the atheists and blessing the devotees! please come forth to dispel our ignorance.

O Baladeva! who has the fortune to be the intimate servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa, if both of you were to arise and show grace us, we would attain success.”

Note:— '*ambaram*' stands for the Divine grace to be received by a cetana; '*tannīr*' stands for the removal of Egotism which stands as a hindrance to achieve that Divine Grace. '*sōru*' stands for service — '*kainkarya*'. These three, viz., Receipt of Divine Grace, removal of Egotism, and the achievement of Kainkarya — will be obtained only through the help of an ācārya or Guru. So an aspirant should approach such an ācārya, receive the Tirumantra, and taking other devotees as his guides should strive for Self/God-realisation.

The scholars opine that this stanza preaches a significant doctrine of Vaiṣṇava philosophy, viz., that one should approach and realise God, as stated in the "Dvaya" mantra, through the puruṣākāram or mediation of the Universal Mother. The Gopis tried to wake Śrī Kṛṣṇa from

sleep, but there was no response from Him. This was because, they did not follow the proper path of seeking Him through His spouse and our gracious and merciful Mother, who had incarnated as Nappinnai. The principle of mediation — that in resorting to the Lord, for our deliverance and liberation, we should approach Him through the mediation of the Universal Mother, who is inseparably situated on His right bosom and forms part and parcel of Himself is the most characteristic feature of the Vaiṣṇava Dharma— and the highest teaching of it's saints and sages. It is dealt with in the Holy mantra known as " Dvaya", which has been so sedulously guarded and handed down by the Vaiṣṇava ācāryas from generation to generation, as the most secret, the most efficacious and the most meaningful of all mantras.

We have seen that the Lord is both the means and the end of salvation. But the Universal Mother is never separated from Him — Mercy cannot be separated from Justice. She showers compassion on us and intercedes with the Lord for our salvation with all Her irresistible beauty and charm. She knows the independence of the Lord and the failings of her deluded children and she therefore interposes Herself, between the two, and would not leave Him even for a single moment, lest per chance, He might call us to account in Her absence! She accompanies the Lord in all His incarnations. She was Sītā in His incarnation as Rāma, and Rukmini when he came as Kṛṣṇa. In Her incarnation as Sītā, she has demonstrated Her compassion and empathy on our behalf. She implored Hanumān to refrain from wreaking vengeance on the Rākṣasis for all the wrongs they had inflicted on Her. She said " Sinful or virtuous, even to the death-deserving, mercy should be shown by the noble. There is nobody who does not commit any wrong."

That her presence and mediation makes all the difference, may be seen from the way in which Kākasura and Rāvana were dealt with by Lord Rāma. The former was the more guilty and yet he was saved by her mercy, whereas the latter who was really less guilty was made to suffer the extreme punishment of death in her absence.

☀ Stanza 18

undu mada kalittan ṭḍāda tōḷ valiyan |
 nanda gopālan marumahaḷē! nappinnāy!
 gandham kamazhum kuzhalī! kaḍai tiravāy |
 vandengum kōzhiyazhaittāna kāṇ | mādhami
 pandal mēl palkāl kuyil inangaḷ kūvina kāṇ |
 pandār virali! un maittunan pēr pāḍa |
 centāmarai kaiyāl cīrār vaḷai olippa |
 vandu tiravāy makizhndēlōr empāvāy ||

*O Daughter-in-law of Nanda Gopa the owner of many mighty elephants.
 and who possesses strong shoulders never turned back on the foe.
 Nappinai! Lady with charming fragrant tresses! Open the door!
 Listen to the roosters crowing everywhere.
 Flocks of cuckoos coo incessantly from the bowers of madhami flowers.
 You, so expert with the ball, we will chant the names of your Lord.
 With your lotus-red hands and jingling bangles,
 Come, joyfully open the door!*

Commentary

In this stanza the Gopis address the wife of Śrī Kṛṣṇa — Nappinnai. This is where the South India tradition differs from the North Indian version in which Kṛṣṇa was unmarried while in Gokula. According to the Southern tradition Kṛṣṇa married Nappinnai after a competition in

which he restrained and yoked seven wild bulls. Nappinnai is identified with Nīlādevi (who is also identified with Rādhā) one of the three consorts of the Lord, the other two being Śrīdevi and Bhūdevi. It is important to note that all three of these are in actual fact various manifestations of Mahā Lakṣmi who accompanies the Lord on each of His incarnations. According to Śrīvaiṣṇava theology Lakṣmi is the mediatrix between the Lord and the jīvas. Through her beauty and grace (*anugraha śakti*) she tempers the absolute justice of the Lord (*nigraha śakti*) and causes him to have compassion and liberate jīvas. In Śrīvaiṣṇava temples it is customary to go first to the shrine of Lakṣmi and entreat her intercession before proceeding to the shrine of the Lord.

Though the Gopis knew of the necessity and efficacy of approaching the Lord through the mediation of His consort, Nappinnai, yet in their enthusiasm to see him, they addressed him directly (in the previous stanza). And when there was no immediate response from the Lord, they realised their mistake and corrected it by resorting to the proper channel, and so in this stanza they appeal to Nappinnai to mediate on their behalf. The question sometimes arises whether it is really necessary to have a mediator and to resort to the Universal Mother as well as to the Lord. The answer is that the mercy of the Divine Mother is in itself the mediation; fire can be extinguished with water, but to cool water when it becomes hot, water itself will serve the purpose.

O Daughter-in-law of Nanda Gopa — The Gopis address Nappinnai as the daughter-in-law of Nandagopa, though she was the daughter of the King Kumbha. The reason being that Indian women are more proud of the family to which they belong by marriage than that of their birth. In the Rāmāyana Sītā began a description of Herself to Hanumān by saying "I am the daughter-in-law of Daśaratha, the fire of enemy-armies."

Nanda Gopa! the owner of many mighty elephants. — How can one expect Nandagopa, a village-headman to possess elephants? The answer is; the Prince Vāsudeva and Nandagopa are such close friends that the property of one is as good as that of the other and Vāsudeva had many elephants.

who possesses strong shoulders never turned back on the foe — refers to the immense strength possessed by Nandagopa who is protecting Kṛṣṇa against the machinations of Kamsa.

Nappinnai! — The Gopis address Nappinnai in a familiar manner, for after the birth of the Lord Kṛṣṇa, every young girl in the Gokula claimed relationship of daughter-in-law to Nandagopa; and as such Nappinnai remained silent when they addressed her as 'daughter-in-law of Nandagopa'. So they had to address her again by calling her name.

Lady with charming fragrant tresses! — "The overwhelming fragrance of your hair betrays your presence, even though you remain silent and pretend that you not home!"

You, so expert with the ball, — Periya Acchān Pillai gives a beautiful commentary:— Kṛṣṇa is the partner to be enjoyed by Nappinnai, the ball is her toy. She has in one hand 'the contained' (*dhāram*) and on the other hand 'the container' (*dhārayanan*): she has in one hand 'substance' (*vibhūti*) and on the other hand the possessor of all substances' (*vibhūtimān*). This dichotomy establishes the *puruṣākara-bhāva*.

The ball that she holds in her hand represents the Universe which is an object of Līlā – sport for the Lord. In the ball game with the Lord she is the winner and this augurs well for the welfare of all beings.

With your lotus-red hands and jingling bangles — the prominence of the bangles is that apart from their natural beauty, Lord Kṛṣṇa will never allow Himself to become separated from Nappinnai. According to Hindu custom when a husband dies the wife breaks her bangles.

Nappinnai is not one who has to suffer in separation from Kṛṣṇa like Āṇḍāl.

Come, joyfully open the door! — You must rise from your bed and walk at least a few feet to open the door. This is said this because Nappinnai was obviously trying to open the door while lying on the bed! And don't open the door reluctantly!

In this verse the five senses are mentioned as being sublimated and directed to the goal of life which is the service of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

- (1) *gandham kamazhum* — refers to the nose and its sense of smell,
- (2) *pēr pāḍa* — to the tongue and its sense of speech
- (3) *vaḷai olippa* — to the ear and its sense of sound
- (4) *vandu* — to the body and its sense of actions and
- (5) *tiṛavāy* — to the eye and its sense of sight (here in seeing the bolt).

It is said that on one occasion, when Śrī Rāmānuja was going on his daily round for alms reciting this poem, to which he was specially attached, he found himself in front of the house of his ācārya, Periya Nambigal. When chanting this stanza, the outer-door of the house which was bolted, was abruptly opened by Attulai, the daughter of Periya Nambigal, as the last words of the stanza — "With thy hand of red lotus and with the jingling of beautiful bangles, come and gladly open the door" — were being sung. Śrī Rāmānuja, who was deeply immersed in the sentiment (*bhāva*) of the stanza, at once imagined her to be Nappinnai herself and fell into a rapturous trance. The incident was, of course, reported to Periya Nambigal, who recognised the stanza at once, even before it was mentioned to him.

Thus, it is quite clear that Śrī Āṇḍāl had an amazing effect upon Śrī Rāmānuja who liked to be called 'Tiruppāvai Jiyar' or the 'Tiruppāvai Saint' when he had numerous other titles and appellations of honour and distinction. Tradition has it that he chanted the Tiruppāvai everyday till the end of his life-time for the good of himself and for the good of posterity.

Śrī Rāmānuja also established the recital of the Tiruppāvai in Lord Venkaṭeśa's Temple at Tirupati and also instituted the recital of Nacchiyār Tirumoli on Thursdays when the God was to be dressed in flowers, without all the jewels and clothing. One of the smaller outer-shrines in Govindarāja's temple is dedicated to Śrī Āṇḍāl and it is built at the instigation of Śrī Rāmānuja.

Esoteric Purport

“O Nappinnai! akin to an ācārya who dispels false ego in others! O Mother! who awakens the Lord's desire to protect His devotees, thereby facilitating the devotion of all! We want to enjoy your company, and to have our ignorance dispelled. The time is auspicious and filled with '*sattva guna*' and so the devotees are waking one another to serve Kṛṣṇa. Those who have fully realised the truths of revelation are calling for you! O Universal Mother! who embraces with one hand the cetanas, and with the other īśvara! Dispel our ignorance so that we may attain enlightenment. If you comply with our request our vow will be successful.”

☀ Stanza 19

kuttu vilakkeriyak kōṭṭukkāl kaṭṭilmēl |
 mettenna pañca śayanattin mēlēri |
 kottalar pūnkuzhal nappinnai koṅgai mēl |
 vaittu kiḍanda malar mārba! vāy tiṛavāy |

maitaḍan kaṇṇināy! nīyun maṇālanai |
 ettanai pōdum tuyil ezhavottāy kāṇ |
 ettanai yēlum pirivāṭṭa killāyāl |
 tattuvam annu tahavēlōr empāvāy ||

*The standing lamps are burning all around, on a downy bed,
 on a cot with five qualities, and ivory legs you lie, garlanded,
 Your broad chest resting on the bosom of Nappinnai.
 Her tresses adorned with flowers, at least open your mouth!
 And you with wide eyes darkened with kohl,
 Will you never allow him to rise ?
 Are you unable to bear separation from him for one second ?
 This is unfair and does not behove you.*

Commentary

In this stanza, Nappinnai is awakened for the ultimate purpose which is to gain union with Kṛṣṇa. In the previous stanza they requested her to come and open the door, and when she was about to start from the bed to open the bolt, Kṛṣṇa restrained her from doing so, for He desired that Nappinnai should not grace them before He did. So the Gopis began again to awaken Kṛṣṇa, but this time Nappinnai prevented Him from joining with them and so they again entreated Nappinnai to allow Kṛṣṇa to arise!

In the Arayirappadi it is stated — "Unless you obtain the grace of the couple — Lord and His spouse — you won't realise your goal, but will suffer like Śūrpanaka and her brother Rāvana. Surpanaka approached Rāma without the mediation of Sītā, and suffered mutilation. Rāvana tried to abduct Sītā in Rāma's absence, and he was destroyed". On the other hand the demon "Kākasura " attacked Sītā but his life was spared because the couple were together!

The standing lamps are burning all around, on a downy bed Your broad chest resting on the bosom of Nappinnai.— In these lines we can detect a hint of jealousy towards Nappinnai. While the gopis seek the Lord in thorny forests and sandy cattle-yards, this Nappinnai has the great fortune to be able to lie beside Him all night long. Not in the least discomforted by having to search for her beloved! Oh, what great fortune she has!

on a cot with five qualities, and ivory legs — the couch supported by tusks of the elephant Kuvalayapīḍa which was killed by the Lord. The commentators consider the four legs to be representative of the Varṇāśrama Code.

The four divisions of society; Intelligensia, administrators, entrepreneurs, & the proletariat.

The four stages of life; student, householder, retiree, and monk.

The four goals of life; righteousness, wealth, sensual pleasures and Liberation, and

The four means (Yogas); works, knowledge, devotion and Surrender.

on a cot with five qualities — This expression is interpreted in many ways — It may mean cotton-bedding or a bed having five qualities viz., beauty, coolness, whiteness, softness, and fragrance or a bed formed out of five substances; tender leaves, flowers, cotton, soft wool, and silk. The inner esoteric meaning implied is the "Artha-pañcaka" or the Five Truths which are the foundation of the Vaiṣṇava Faith (discussion to follow).

Your broad chest resting on the bosom of Nappinnai — This form of address hints that the Lord will do as Nappinnai wants him to do, for he is easily manipulated by her love & devotion.

at least open your mouth! — "You need not even rise from your bed, but at least say something to allay our fears and grant us solace, but even this you do not do!"

From the previous two line we can also infer — "Even if you give your chest to Nappinnai can you not at least give your mouth to us ?" i.e. speak a word to us.

And you with wide eyes darkened with kohl — Nappinnai is addressed in this way. The gopis say: "We have taken a vow not to apply kohl to our eyes, but on the other hand you have adorned your eyes. So should we not also behave like you?"

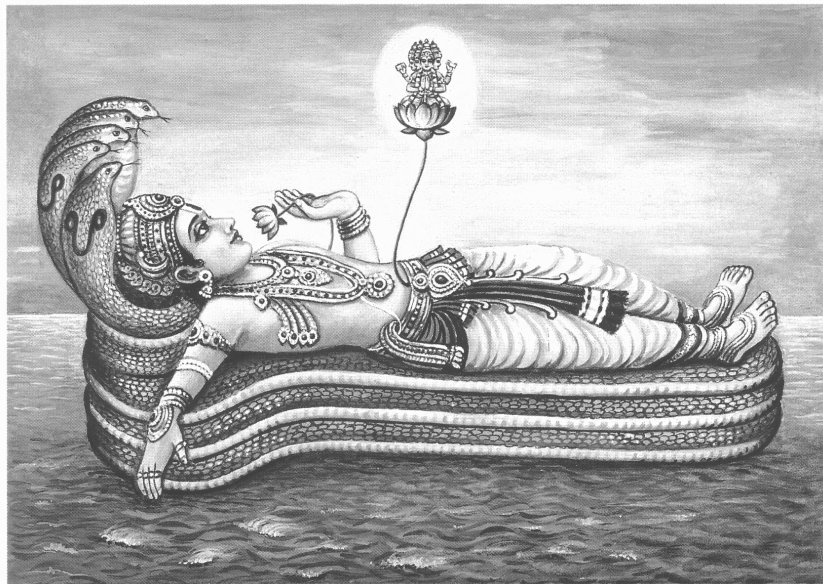
This is unfair and does not behove you. — The expression *tattuvam* means this behaviour is not befitting your *svarūpa* or essential being and *atahavan* means that it also does not conform with your *svabhāva* or nature. The "essential being" for Nappinnai is to be the mediatrix which she is not complying with right now. Her nature is to be compassionate, but now she is being cruel because she does not allow her Lord to get up from bed.

Esoteric Purport

"O Omniscient one who is sleeping in the minds of the seekers of Salvation upon the base of the knowledge of *Artha-pañcaka*. O You who are lying on the couch of this Material world (*Līlā vibhūti*) with the four kinds of 'action' as the four legs — the four types of actions which arise from *ahamkāra*, which are to be extinguished are :—

1. *śeṣatva-kartṛtvam* — pursuing dependence on temporal things and people.
2. *jñāṭṛtvam-kartṛtvam* — pursuing knowledge of purely material nature
3. *kartṛtvam-kartṛtvam* — pursuing action for accomplishing material goals
4. *bhogṛtvam-kartṛtvam* — pursuing enjoyment of temporary pleasures

and with the four *puruṣārthas* as the joints! Please open your mouth to utter at least a word of consolation to us". (But Kṛṣṇa remained silent, and realising their mistake, that they had not followed the proper path of seeking mediation through the Universal Mother, began to address Nappinnai). O Nappinnai! Who is dazzling with brilliance, due to your immaculate nature (*śuddha sattva guṇa*)! You are never separated from the Lord, for you cannot bear the slightest degree of separation. As you are the mediatrix it is not befitting to both your '*svarūpa*' and '*svabhāva*' to hinder us from uniting with the Lord. So, you must help us by making your Lord join our company so that our *kainkaryā nonbu* may end successfully.



The Artha Pañcaka

It is essential for every Vaiṣṇava to have a knowledge of *Artha-pañcaka* or the Five Essential Truths which are as follows; —

- The *Paramātmā svarūpa*, or Nature of God known in Tamil as *mikka viṇai-nilai*
- The *Jivātmā svarūpa*, the Nature of the Self — *uyir-nilai*
- The *upāya svarūpa*, the means to attain salvation — *takka nerigaḷ*
- The *Virodhi svarūpa*, the obstacles to Self-realisation— *jīvātmā virodigaḷ*
- The *Puruṣārtha svarūpa*, the experience of the Paramātmā — *vāḷvinai or mukti*.

The above five have been briefly referred to by Bhaṭṭar in his Taniyan which is as follows:—

*mikka viṇai-nilaiyum meyyām uyir-nilaiyum
takka neṇiyum taḍaiyāgit— tokkiyalum
uḻhvinium vazhvinaiyum ōdhum kurukaiyarkōn*

❖ *mikka viṇai-nilaiyum*

This deals about the essential nature of God, His supremacy & transcendence, which is beyond the range of all comprehension. The following quotations from the Divya Prabandham instruct us in these concepts —

iṇainilai uṇarvaṇidhu (Tiruvāy 1-3-6) — The Lord's nature is beyond human comprehension.

manidarkkut-dēvarpōlat-dēvarkkum dēvāvō (8-1-5) — There is so much difference between Thyself and the Devas as there is difference between human beings and Devas.

deva devanai (3-6-2) — The God of gods.

parañjoti nī paramāy (3-1-3) — Thou art the Spiritual Radiance. Thou art the Heavenly Being.

mikum jōti (2-2-5)— The refulgent light.

muzhutunḍa paran (1-1-8)— He completely consumed all this.

vānōr iṇai (1-5-1) — The Lord of the Devas.

periyav-appanai birama-appanai uruttiran-appanai. (8-1-11) — The Great Father, Brahma's Father, and Rudra's Father,

❖ *uyir-nilai*

meyyām-uyir-nilai — denotes that the individual Self is not independent of the Supreme Self, but totally dependent on him for its very existence.

uruviyanda innilaimai (Tiruvay 1-3-6) — His nature is above the material existence.

The expression '*meyyam uyir*' signifies the immortality of the Individual Self. It also signifies the '*śarīra-śarīri bhāva*' i.e., the Individual Self has the relationship similar to that of the 'body' to the Universal Self. In addition, the expression '*uyir nilai*' signifies the nature (*svārūpa*) of the Jivātmā, viz., Servitude.

1. *tam-aḍiyār aḍiyōṅgaḷ* (Tiruvay 3-7-10) — Servant of His servants.

2. *tonḍan śaṭagopan* (7-1-11) — the servant śatakopa (Namālṽār).

3. *siṟu māmanisarāy ennai āṇḍār* (8-10-3) — The little men have become my masters.

❖ *takka-neri*

The means to attain salvation is through the Lord Himself; i.e. through *prapatti* – self-surrender.

kaṇṇanallāl illai kaṇḍīr māran (9-1-19) — there is no refuge except Lord Kṛṣṇa
neri also denotes the three yogas — karma-yoga, jñāna-yoga and bhakti yoga as well as ācārya abhimāna — taking refuge in a preceptor.

❖ *jīvātma virodigaḷ*

taḍaiyāgi-tokkiyalum-ūzhvinaigaḷ (*jīvātma-virodhi*) — These are the various obstacles to God-realisation such as unskillful action, egoism, possessiveness etc. These obstacles are divided into five groups;

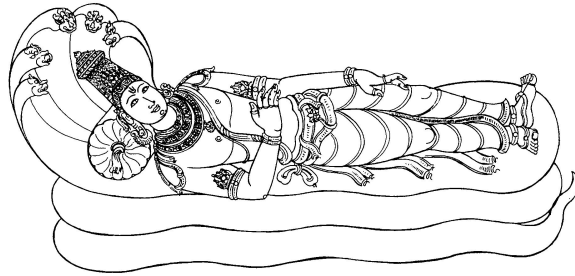
1. *svarūpa-virodhi* — that which is hostile to the Self-nature.
2. *parattva-virodhi* — anti-Divine nature
3. *puruṣārtha-virodhi* — the obstacles on the path
4. *upāya-virodhi* — that which is antithetical to the true means
5. *prapatti-virodhi* — that which is antithetical to one's ideal or goal

❖ *vāl-vinai (mukti)*

This refers to the ultimate state of the beatific vision.

1. *nin tāzhiṇaik-kīzh vāzhcci* (tiruvay 3-2-4) — to live beneath Thy feet
2. *vāzhvaidhi jñālam pugazha vāzhvar* (3-3-11) — they will attain eternal life and bliss and will witness the world praising them.

According to the ācārya Parampara it is said that this stanza illustrates the prayer *śrīdharāya namaḥ*. In lines 3 and 4 it can be seen that unlike Viṣṇu bearing Śrī on His chest, Nappinnai is bearing Him on Her breast. Further, it is evident from the last four lines of this stanza that the Universal Mother may delay a bit in the act of mediation; this is done solely with the idea of testing the intensity of the self-surrender made by the *cetana*. In this stanza and in the next (20) it is stated that the Lord remained caught in 'the eddies of Nappinnai' viz., in her large and beautiful eyes, her full and delicate breasts (*seppanna menmulay*), her red and cherry lips (*sevvāy*) her slender waist (*śirumarūṅgul*). The standard of worldly aesthetics and beauty are here used to illustrate the captivating beauty of Nappinnai. The recital of the love-games of Kṛṣṇa have been considered as most purifying by the learned sages.



☀ Stanza 20

muppattu mūvar amararkku mun cennu |
 kappam tavirkkum kaliyē! tuyilezhāy!
 ceppam uḍaiyāy! tiṛal uḍaiyāy! | cettārkkku
 veppam koḍukkum vimalā! tuyilezhāy |
 ceppanna men mulai cevvē cīru maruṅgu |
 nappinnai nangāy! tiruvē! tuyilezhāy |
 ukkamum taṭṭoliyum tandun maṇāḷanai |
 ippōdēy emmai nīr āṭṭēlōr empāvāy ||

*O Valiant Lord who hastens before the Thirty Three gods,
 out of grace, to remove the fear of their enemies; Arise O Lord!
 Compassionate and skilful, you who strike fear into the hearts
 of your enemies, O Lord Immaculate and Holy, Arise!
 O Nappinnai! Goddess of beauty and fortune! with cup like breasts,
 enchanting rosy lips and slender waist, please arise!
 Give us the fan and the mirror and your husband too,
 at this very moment, for helping us to fulfill our vow.*

Commentary

When the gopis criticised Nappinnai's actions, as not befitting her '*svarūpa*' and '*svabhāva*' Nappinnai was hurt and remained silent. The gopis then turned to awaken Kṛṣṇa and so they began to wake him up singing His glory. He also kept silent, and the gopis thought that perhaps, Kṛṣṇa Himself might have been angry with them for their rebuking of Nappinnai and, if that were the case, they wanted to pacify His anger by eulogising Nappinnai.

According to Vaiṣṇava theology the Lord possesses absolute justice (*nigraha shakti*) while Śrī possess absolute compassion (*anugraha shakti*). The Lord is captivated by her exquisite beauty and grace and responds to her entreaties to temper justice with compassion and to redeem the fallen sinners. The Lord Himself is requested because He is not only the Goal but also the Means to the Goal.

O Valiant Lord who hastens before the Thirty Three gods, — Godā addresses the Lord directly in a taunting manner; He has the ability to guide and protect the 33 gods and to dispel their fear and yet delays to come to the aid of these simple milk-maids who have come to seek His help! "You have granted protection to those who are immortal: whereas, you cannot help us; who are totally dependant on your grace! You have afforded protection to those gods who are selfish, arrogant and ungrateful but we are unselfish, helpless, and are longing for your companionship and the chance to serve you!"

hasten before — The idea implied here is that the Lord as the Protector should not have waited to be approached but should have taken the initiative.

O Lord Immaculate and Holy, — The beauty of this address lies in the fact that although the Lord terrifies and dispatches His enemies, He will not, in the least, be tainted with sins and will remain perfectly pure.

Give us the fan and the mirror — The two stand as indicators (*upalakṣa*) for the other accessories necessary for the celebration of the *Nonbu*. The fan esoterically represents the cooling of the mind and drying out of the ego appearing as inner heat. The mirror represents self-analysis and reflection on one's true nature.

ippōdēy emmai nīrāṭṭu — This phrase alludes to sexual union. Periya Acchān Pillai comments on this verse as follows;— It is customary to give credit to the Purohit who performs the rites of the marriage, as the one who is responsible for the successful conclusion of the marriage, though strictly speaking, the marriage is due to the couple becoming enamoured of each other. Similarly though Kṛṣṇa Himself has promised the gopis His companionship still the credit will go to Nappinnai, if she makes the Lord join them.

Esoteric Purport

“O īśvara! who dispels the fear of the approach of ignorance in devotees! please wake up and give Darśan. O Impartial One! O Valiant One! that strikes terror in the hearts of the enemies of your devotees! You remain silent even after all your devotees call for you to come out and join them.

O Mother! Paragon of devotion, beauty and dispassion and O Mediatrix! Please wake up. Dispel our false ego (*ahaṁkāra*) and sense of possession (*mamākāra*) in our service to the Lord. Grant us the true knowledge of the Self and unite us with your Lord.

(In this verse, '*men mulai*' stands for 'the budding devotion'; '*cevvāy*' — for 'beauty', '*marungul*' — for *vairāgya* or dispassion; '*ukkam*' — for the removal of ego – *ahaṁkāra* and possessiveness – *mamākāra*; '*tatoli*' for '*svarūpa jñāna*' i.e., knowledge of one's total dependence on the Lord.)

According to ācārya Paramapara, this verse is a commentary on the expression "*Śrīyai namaḥ*" "*Śrīdharāya namaḥ*", and one can see in this stanza the significance of the Divine Couple (Justice and Mercy). In stanza 18, 'Śrī' is awakened; and in the first half of Stanza 19, 'Śrīdhara' is awakened. But the latter half of Stanza 19 shows that, one hinders the other, from being the first, in showering the grace on the gopis. So in this stanza, we find that both of them are being awakened together.

☀ Stanza 21

etta kalangaḷ edir pōngi mīdaḷippa |
 mātādē pāl coriyum vaḷḷal perum pasukkaḷ |
 āttā paḍaittān mahanē! aṟivurāy |
 uttam uḍaiyāy! periyāy! ulaginil
 tōttamāy ninna śuḍarē! tuyil ezhāy!
 mātār unakku vali tolaundun vāṣarḱaṇ |
 āttādu vandun aḍipaṇiyumā pōlē |
 pōtti yām vandōm pugazhdēlōr empāvāy ||

O son of the one who is blessed with countless, generous cows.

Showering milk, overflowing jars kept under their udders.

O Stable One, Protector of those who come to You for refuge,

The effulgent light of the universe, please arise.

Like Your routed foes, losing strength and pride,

surrendering and seeking refuge at your door;

We too have come singing Your praises,

To fall helpless at Your feet.

Commentary

The gopis have now secured the assistance of Nappinnai who joins them in arousing the Lord.

Godā makes an interesting comparison between the gopis and the vanquished enemies of the Lord. This is said to reflect the total and utter humility of the devotees and the spirit of surrender when one finally gives up the struggle to liberate oneself from the bonds of materialism and surrenders totally to the Lord saying "I am thine"! It also implies that they recognise themselves as fallen sinners and request the Lord's forgiveness and compassion.

Two qualifications are necessary for the acceptance of a *prapanna* (one who desires to surrender) by the Lord.

- (1) the *prapanna* should be free from egoism and
- (2) should bear no allegiance to any other but the Lord.

The gopis declare that they have both these qualifications. Their egoism had been wiped out by contemplating the super-human pastimes of the Lord, and His inestimable qualities.

O son of the one who is blessed with countless, generous cows — the cows were as innumerable as his good qualities and as noble and generous as Nanda in filling all vessels taken to them, to overflowing with their continuous and copious shower of milk.

The emotion or '*bhāva*' in addressing the Lord as Nandagopa's son is — "You are born in Gokula, leaving *paramapada* and the Milky ocean, only for the purpose of redeeming the fallen ones who approach you. So you should be fulfilling the object of your birth, please don't sleep away your time."

O Stable One! — He whose foundation lay deep and unshakeable in the highest source of knowledge, the Vedas; and whose greatness in inconceivable (beyond word and thought) This inconceivable greatness of the Lord has been attested by His manifesting himself to the whole world.

The effulgent light of the universe — For you Lord! every Avatāra or rebirth makes your effulgence shine hundred-thousand fold more than what it was previously, unlike in the case of ordinary mortals, who lose their brightness every time they were reborn.

These last three lines convey the idea, that:—

"just as Kākasura and other enemies prostrated at your feet, unable to withstand your mighty valour, so also we, poor girls, came out of our privacy, stung by the pangs of separation, blessing you like Periyālvār unable to withstand your irresistible attraction."

Esoteric Purport

"O Son of that ācārya whose disciples achieved such perfect enlightenment so as to be able to teach others! Pray arise; O Supreme Truth! O Great manifest Effulgence may others too see you! Please protect us. Just as your enemies filled with egoism, lose all their vitality before you and surrender themselves completely at your feet, so also are we lost in your majesty. Casting aside our attachment to the body, notion of independence, and allegiance to others, we seek refuge at your feet, praising you."

Some scholars say that *paśukka!* (cows) denotes disciples, *āṇṇā paḍaittān* denotes the ācārya Rāmānuja and *mahanē* denotes '*Chella-pillai*' or '*Sampat-kumaran*', the Lord of Tiru-nārāyanapūram, (Melkote in the Mysore State who was installed and favoured by Rāmānuja). Though Śrī Āṇḍāl is far anterior in date to Rāmānuja (Emperumānār), still to sing a verse which fits in well with an inner significance applicable to the Lord of Tiru-nārāyana-pūram is really commendable.

☀ Stanza 22

aṅganmā nālat-taraśar | abhimāna
 bhaṅgamāy vandu nin paḷḷik kaṭṭiṛ kīzhē |
 śaṅghaṃ iruppār pōl vandu talai peydōm |
 kiṅgiṇi vāy ceyda tāmarai pūppōlē |
 śeṅgan ciṛu ciṛidēy emmēl vizhīyāvō ? |
 tiṅgaḷum ādittiyanum ezhundār pōl |
 aṅgan iraṇḍum koṇḍeṅgaḷ mēl nōkkudiyēl |
 eṅgaḷ mēl śāpam izhindēlōr empāvāy ||

*We have come here, like the kings of this beautiful wide world,
 Humbled, renouncing pride and gathered at the foot of your throne,
 We too have come seeking you, with bended head,
 will not your benign eyes like half blossomed lotuses,
 resembling little bells, open upon us little by little ?
 If you will deign to look upon us with your two eyes
 that resemble the sun and the moon arisen;
 We will be freed from the curse of all our sins.*

Commentary

Again in this stanza the means of *prapatti* or self-surrender is stressed as the only means to obtain the Lord. One has first to realise that not only we, but everything that exists belongs to the Lord, so giving up ego, the idea of agency and proprietorship one should take refuge in the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa. The Lord's eyes are compared to the sun and the moon. The sun dispels the darkness of sloth and ignorance and the moon is cool, refreshing, life-giving and invigorating. When Kṛṣṇa's glance-of-grace — *kṛipa-kaṭākṣa* falls upon us we shall be completely purified of our sins and attain salvation.

Humbled, renouncing pride and gathered at the foot of your throne— denotes that "just as the kings of this earth having suppressed their egoism sought refuge in groups at the foot of Thy throne, so also we gopis, have abandoned our sense of self-glory and sought refuge in you, being lured by your inestimable qualities". The kings sought refuge in Him for they have no other go, whereas the gopis sought refuge, for doing service unto Him.

resembling little bells, open upon us little by little — a *kiṅgiṇi* is a kind of bell-like ornament half-open and half-shut. So the expression alludes to a half-blossomed lotus. Can you not slowly and gradually open your eyes and gaze upon us? — For a frail human cannot bear the immediate and direct gaze of the Lord.

We will be freed from the curse of all our sins — refers to the accumulative effects of negative acts which should be expiated through penance, if the Lord's grace is not shown.

Esoteric Purport

“Just as the kings, who are noted for their arrogance and egoism, lost all their power, and sought refuge in groups at the foot of Thy throne, after renouncing all their sense of self-glory, so also we have sought refuge in you, after abandoning our egoism. O Kṛṣṇa! O Protector! please open your merciful eyes slowly on us and dispel our ignorance. If we obtain your grace in full, our attachment to the body will vanish, and our understanding of servitude will improve; then we won't seek any other means and the feeling that 'we are the doers' will disappear once and for all. Then we will be in a position to enjoy your good qualities in full. In this way if you bestow your Grace on us and infuse in us abiding devotion, we will be

relieved of the distress due to the separation from you, and our vow will be accomplished.”

☀ Stanza 23

māri malai muzhaiñjil manni kiḍanduṇangum |
 cīriya śingam aṇivuṇṇut tī-vizhittu |
 vēri mayir ponga eppāḍum pērndudari |
 mūri nimirndu muzhangi puṇappaṭṭu |
 pōdarumā pōlē ni pūvaippu-vāṇṇa! | un
 kōyil ninninganē pōndaruḷi | kōppuḍaiya
 cīriya śingāsanattirundu | yām vanda
 kāriyam ārāynd-aruḷēlōr empāvāy ||

*Like a majestic lion that lies asleep in a mountain cave
 during the rainy season, opening its fiery eyes,
 Rises heroically, stretching and shaking its mane,
 roaring loudly, it steps out majestically.
 O Lord of the dark complexion like that of the puvai flower, may it
 please you to proceed from your mansion, and
 ascend the grand and lofty throne in your temple, and
 enquire into the purpose which has brought us here.*

Commentary

In this verse, the gopis request Lord Kṛṣṇa to rouse himself and to issue out of his abode making a dignified move to the Hall of Audience, there to grace his throne and hear their prayer.

Like a majestic lion — In the first stanza Godā called Kṛṣṇa Yaśoda's lion cub and now she compares him to a full grown adult lion. The majesty of the lion consists in the fact that no one need crown the Lion as "the King of the beasts" it possesses regality by its very birth.

that lies asleep in a mountain cave during the rainy season, — The mountainous breasts of Nappinnai are compared to a mountain den prepared by the lions for winter hibernation. The rainy season is the period (*catur-māsyam*) in which monks remain in one place for practicing religious austerities and meditation. For the farmers it is a period of joy and expectation because it brings the promise of abundant harvests. The commentators add that this season also represents the ocean of relative mundane existence in which spiritual ignorance causes an endless cycle of rebirths.

The lion, when hibernating with its lioness during winter, would be totally immersed in bliss forgetting even its own needs. In the same way Lord Kṛṣṇa forgetting his own duty and also his devotees lies clasped within the bosom of his consort Nappinnai.

Kṛṣṇa's 'sleep' is not a mundane result of strenuous effort but it is a *Yoga nidra* a yogic trance-like state which he assumes at the time of involution when the entire universe is re-absorbed into his body. In this state he contemplates upon what should be done after the great cosmic dissolution when he initiates a new cycle of creation.

opening its fiery eyes — The fierce gaze of the lion seeking those who trespass in its territory is a metaphor used here to describe the angry look of Lord Kṛṣṇa whenever he sees any one of his devotee's adversaries.

please you to proceed from your mansion — Kṛṣṇa's gait conforms to the four classical gaits of a bull, male elephant, tiger and lion, as described by the treatises of aesthetics.

ascend the grand and lofty throne in your temple — the Āyirapaḍḍi comments that the classical throne should be adorned with all the 'cara' and 'acara'— mobile and immobile things — existing in both the worlds (*nitya vibhūti* and *līlā vibhūti*). Periya Acchān Piḷḷai comments that the throne known as *dharmādi-pīṭham* — borne by ādiśeṣa in Śrī Vaikuṇṭha, descended to this world (*līlā vibhūti*) when the Lord incarnated as Kṛṣṇa in order to serve as a seat for him here also. This divine throne, he says, has eight legs, viz., *dharma* (righteousness), *adharma* (unrighteousness); *jñāna* (wisdom) and *ajñāna* (nescience); *vairāgya* (dispassion) and *avairāgya* (attachment); *aiśvarya* (prosperity) and *anaiśvarya* (penury). The throne which they wish Him to ascend in his temple is actually the lotus of the heart within the body which is the temple of God.

The gopis request him to take his seat on the throne and then to hear their prayer because it will then be formal and binding — like the teaching given on the battle-field sitting on the chariot (by Śrī Kṛṣṇa).

enquire into the purpose which has brought us here — “ask us about the business and purpose that have brought us here” — The real purpose is stated in Stanza 29:—

" We will be bound to Thee for ever and ever, and we will serve Thee alone, Remove,
Thou all other desires."

Consider deeply within yourself why all of us have come to you, and then grant us our wishes. The gopis speak like this, for if they state before hand the purpose for which they have come, he may even refuse to grant their prayer and then there is none to coax him for he is a 'svatantra' (Completely independent of others).

Esoteric Purport

“O Lord! blue in colour like the Kaya flower! During the great deluge when all the worlds are dissolved, You alone remain absorbed in Yogic meditation on the Upanishads. Again, the desire arises to reproject these worlds and then you venture forth into Creation in a magnificent form, separating yourself from the primordial nature (*prakṛti*). So also you must come forth now, from your inner abode, to the Hall of '*dvaya mantra*' and sit on the throne, which possesses the virtue of fulfilling the desires of those who approach it. O Lord! if it please you, inquire of us, the business and purpose that have brought us here to you, and shower your grace on us.”

☀ Stanza 24

anniv-ullagam aḷandāy aḍi pōṭri |
cenṇāṅgut tennilaṅgai ceṇṇāy tiṇal pōṭri!
ponna śakaṭam udaittāy pugazh pōṭri!
kannu kuṇilāverindāy kazhal pōṭri!
kunnu kuḍaiyāy eḍuttāy! guṇam pōṭri!
vennu pagai keḍukkum nin kaiyil vēl pōṭri!
ennennun śēvakamēyēttip paṇai koḷvān |
innu yām vandōm iraṅgēlōr empāvāy ||

*You measured the earth that day; blessed be Your feet!
You went and destroyed Lanka in the south; blessed be Your prowess!
With a kick You destroyed the cart-demon; blessed be Your glory!
You flung the calf-demon as if from a sling, blessed be Your anklets!
You lifted up the mountain like an umbrella; blessed be your goodness!*

*O Vanquisher of foes; blessed be the spear in Your hand!
Thus and thus singing about Your heroic exploits we have come for the drum,
Won't you relent, and have compassion on us ?*

Commentary

The gopis are now so overcome by the beauty of Lord Kṛṣṇa that they not only praise Him but also pronounce benedictions on Him out of profound love, just as the Rishis of Daṇḍakāraṇya forgot the humiliations they had suffered at the hands of the Rākṣasas when they saw the gorgeous form of Rāma standing before them, and began to bless Him. Thus, so great indeed, has been the love roused in some of the eminent saints by the charming personality of God, that they have even forgotten the relationship of superior and inferior, of protector and protected, and blessed him, the Omnipotent Lord. The most notable instance of such a saint, being Periyāḷvar, (the father of our Poetess) who sang the Tiruppallāṇḍu.

Lord Kṛṣṇa may be contemplated in two aspects:—

(1) His Being and (2) His exquisite beauty.

When one contemplates upon his Being (*svarūpa*) one regards oneself as the protected and the Lord as the Protector. When one contemplates Kṛṣṇa's *saukumārya* (exquisite beauty), the position is entirely reversed. The former is the stage of knowledge, the latter that of extreme love which transcends the highest knowledge and holds even the Most-high and All-pervading Lord in its lap.

Here one may ask "is it not a paradox or perversion of knowledge (*viparīta jñāna*) to bless the Lord instead of importuning Him for the attainment of desires?". The answer is, that because of profound devotion, His Omnipotence (*sarva-balamai*), all-protecting ability (*sarva-rakṣagatvata*) and other qualities are completely forgotten when one comes face to face with Kṛṣṇa. Attracted like a magnet by his exquisite beauty (*saukumārya*) the devotee begins to bless Him and pray for His safety. Moreover, it is the duty of a servant to pray for his master's welfare. Even ādiśeṣa becomes anxious for the safety of the Lord, and emits fire from his thousand mouths in *paramapada* so what is wrong in these poor girls, pouring forth their blessings on Kṛṣṇa, being afraid for the safety of their Lord, in the Gokula.

Now, another question may be asked— "Instead of blessing Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, why should they bless His feet etc?". The answer is that these bodily parts are instrumental in the fulfillment of His glorious exploits. The feet are a focus for much devotion and ritual worship because they are the lowest part of the body. In an attitude of utter humility and self surrender one takes the lowest part of the Body of the Lord and places it upon the highest or cleanest part of the body of the devotee - the head. This is the symbology behind the wearing of the *tirunāmam* or white and red lines upon the forehead. The two white lines represent the feet of the Lord and the red center line represents Lakṣmī.

You measured the earth that day— Here Godā mentions the Vāmana incarnation for the third time, *You destroyed the cart-demon* — and the killing of the cart-demon for the second time.

You flung the calf-demon as if from a sling— Here another incident from the life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is mentioned — the killing of Vatsāsura who took the form of a calf and mingled with the cows that Lord Kṛṣṇa was tending and then at the opportune moment tried to kill Him, needless to say Lord Kṛṣṇa made short work of him. One should note that Kṛṣṇa 'used a thorn to take out another thorn'. This illustrates his technique to kill the wicked through the wicked by reference to the dexterity with which Kapiṣṭhāsura was killed by flinging Vatsāsura at him!

You lifted up the mountain like an umbrella — Indra was deprived of his usual annual festival & offerings on the instruction of Kṛṣṇa, he retaliated against the cow-herders by sending down a deluge. Kṛṣṇa saved them by raising the mountain on His little finger as an umbrella.

blessed be Your feet! — signifies that for measuring these three worlds you have to place only two steps, whereas, we sinners, make you place at least ten steps for our sake thereby causing pain to your tender lotus feet.

blessed be Your glory! — this refers to the glory attained by the baby Kṛṣṇa, in killing Śakaṭāsura alone unaided even by his mother. The word "*ponṛa*" (destroyed) denotes, not like Marīcha, who was released to do further mischief, but was killed once and for all.

Periya Acchān Piḷḷai comments that it is absolutely more essential to bless the Lord in Kṛṣṇāvatara than to bless Him in Rāmāvatara. In the Rāmāvatara, the father of Rāma is the renowned warrior Daśaratha who killed Sambara in battle; the place is Ayodhya, where no enemy can enter. The purohitas are Vasiṣṭha and the other rishis, who are great sages and seers. The brothers are all paragons of valour who had vanquished many demonic kings. So there is no necessity to bless Rāma for he can defend himself and also has many capable associates. In the Kṛṣṇāvatara the parents are innocent graziers; the place is a remote village, the adversaries are fierce monsters like Kamsa, and even women posing as nurses (Pūtana) pose mortal danger! What else can we do but bless the Lord in Kṛṣṇāvatāra!

blessed be your goodness! — praise and safety to your graciousness — the Lord's graciousness (*nṛśamsyam*) lies in sparing the life of Indra, enduring his attack and at the same time protecting the cows and graziers from their miserable plight, by lifting up the Govardhana Hill.

blessed be the spear in Your hand! — this reference to his having a spear in his hands is quite in keeping with the expression in stanza one which refers to the spear in Nandagopa's hand. As is the father, so is the son. Further, it is usual for cowherds to carry spears.

The Arayirappadi comments that just as six kinds of tastes— sweet, sour, astringent, pungent, saltish and bitter — are essential for perfect gustatory satisfaction; so also six kinds of blessings to the lord— *aḍi pōṛṛi*, *tīral pōṛṛi*, *pugazh pōṛṛi*, *kazhal pōṛṛi*, *guṇam pōṛṛi*, *vēl pōṛṛi*, — are thought necessary by these Gopis to have perfect spiritual satisfaction for themselves.

Won't you relent, and have compassion on us? — denotes, that praises or blessings are of no avail to compel the Lord to grant ones desires, the Lord must grant the desires out of His own Grace.

Esoteric Purport

As desired by the devotees, Kṛṣṇa left the bed-chamber and seated himself in the *dvaya-maṇḍapa*. Captivated by the magnetic personality of the Lord, the devotees forgot the purpose for which they had come and began to bless the Lord, singing His praises as follows:—

“You who measured this world steeped in *ahaṁkāra* and *mamākāra* and thereby not only purified it but demonstrated your lordship (*svāmitvam*) many blessings to your feet. O Great one! who destroyed this *prakṛti* the repository of egotism, with its composite three *gunas*! blessings to your unbounded prowess. O Destroyer of the evils like selfish-desire (*kāma*) and anger (*krodha*) which entangle the Jīva! May your illimitable fame be blessed. O Up-rooter of desire in this world! Blessings to your ornamented lotus-feet. O Protector of the devoted! blessings to your endearing qualities; may your Discus which destroys the adversaries of your devotees be blessed. In this way, we have approached you, singing your glorious exploits at this auspicious time, to receive the *puruṣārtha* from you. Doubtless we should have awaited

your arrival, but instead we have come to you to pray in your presence. If you have compassion on us and grant us Your Grace, our *nonbu* will be successful.”

☀ Stanza 25

orutti mahanāy piṇandu | ōr iraviḷ
 orutti mahanāy olittu vaḷara |
 tarikkilān āgit tān tīngu ninainda |
 karuttai pizhai pittu kañjan vayittil |
 neruppenna ninna neḍumālē | unnai
 aruttittu vandōm paṇai tarudiyāhil |
 tirut takka celvamum cēvakamum yām pāḍi |
 varuttamum tīṇdu makizhundēlōr empāvāy ||

*Born to one mother, and at the dead of night
 lodged with another to be bred unknown.
 You frustrated the chagrined tyrant's plots.
 A raging fire within his (Kamsa's) belly.
 We have come here your beggars O Nedumal (Trivikrama)!
 Should you grant us the drum we seek,
 We shall ever sing of Your bounty, befitting the Goddess of Wealth,
 and Your might, our sorrows dispelled, we shall rejoice.*

Commentary

This stanza recalls the circumstances of Kṛṣṇa's birth. He was born to Vasudeva and Devakī the sister of the demonic king Kamsa. Kamsa for fear of his life had imprisoned them, but at the moment of Kṛṣṇa's birth the doors were opened and Vasudeva escaped to Vrindāvan with baby Kṛṣṇa. There He was lodged with Nanda and Yaśoda. Kamsa hatched several plots to have Him killed by various demons.

Born to one mother — 'one lady' — If the name of the lady were to be mentioned the gopis feared that Kamsa might do her some harm; and so they simply said 'one lady' *orutti*. In the first line, 'one lady' refers to Devaki and in the second line, it refers to Yaśoda. In both cases the expression means "peerless woman". Devaki was peerless, for she compelled the Supreme Lord of the Universe, to obey her instructions! It should be noted that the Lord gave the *Avatāra Rasa* to Devaki and *Līlā Rasa* to Yaśoda. According to the commentators Devaki and Yaśoda represent the two sacred mantras; the *aṣṭhākṣari* — *om namo nārāyaṇāya* and the other the *dvādaśākṣari* — *om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*.

and at the dead of night — Here lies the pathos that the Supreme Being who is beyond Time and Space is born in the night and grows in concealment!

You frustrated the chagrined tyrant's plots — Here the poetess refrains from explicitly stating that Kamsa wanted to kill Kṛṣṇa, but simply says "contemplated to do evil". Great poets will not stoop to mention explicitly harsh and inauspicious words or ideas.

A raging fire within his (Kamsa's) belly — Kamsa became so agitated by Kṛṣṇa's existence that it was like a raging fire in his belly.

Should you grant us the drum we seek, We shall ever sing of Your bounty — The gopis actually mention that the drum is simply an excuse to come and sing Kṛṣṇa's praises. If He would give it to them then they would be in His debt forever.

Esoteric Purport

“O Īśvara! You are manifest explicitly in the sacred mantra composed of eight syllables (*aṣṭhākṣari*) and you are concealed in the twelve syllabled mantra (*dvādaśākṣari*). The cetanas who are your servants have blessed you. and as a result your status has been reinforced; seeing your power, the ego (*ahaṁkāra*) began to hate you, and you have uprooted it totally. Now we have come to you to receive the purpose of our being (*puruṣārtha*). If you grant us the *puruṣārtha*, we shall ever sing of your prosperity befitting your consort Lakṣmi, and of your *rowess*, and with our sorrow of separation from you removed, we shall rejoice for ever; and thus our vow will end successfully.”

☀ Stanza 26

mālē! maṇivaṇṇā! mārgazhi nīr āḍuvān |
 melaiyār ceyvaṅgaḷ vēṇḍuvana kēṭṭiyēl |
 nālattaiy ellām naḍunga muralvana |
 pāl anna vaṇṇattun pāñcajanniyamē |
 pōlvana śaṅgaṅgaḷ pōy pāḍu uḍaiyanavē |
 cāla perum paṛaiyē | pallāṇḍiśaippārē |
 kōla viḷakkē, koḍiyē vitānamē |
 ālin ilaiyāy! aruḷ ēlōr empāvāy |

*O Love Incarnate! Sapphire-hued One, if You should ask what
 we need to observe as of old the Margazhi bath,
 An observance of ancient tradition,
 It is conches like Your Panchajanya, milk-white,
 capable of setting the world atremble with their tumultuous sound.
 Great big drums, choristers to chant your praises,
 Decorative lamps, pendants and canopies kindly give us,
 O Lord who reclines on the banyan leaf.*

Commentary

All the articles requested here by the gopis have profound esoteric significance.

O Love Incarnate! — up to now the Gopis have addressed the Lord in a formal manner as Nārāyaṇa etc. Now they address Him as the paramour. *mālē* also means "the great", they were previously under the impression that Śrī Kṛṣṇa's greatness lies in His transcendence (*paratvam*) as Nārāyaṇa, but now they have truly realised that it lies in the Lord's qualities of *vātsalyam* tender overwhelming compassion or *saulabhyam* i.e., endearing himself to the low, by spontaneously and freely mixing with them without any reserve.

Sapphire-hued One — the colour of the Lord is described as being as blue as the sapphire. The sky and the ocean are seen to be blue in colour when in actual fact they are both colourless. The reason for the colour is due to their immeasurable depths. So it is with the Lord because of His immeasurable, unfathomable and inscrutable nature He is described as being blue.

Śrī Vedānta Deśikan enumerates the characteristics of a 'gem' in one of his stotras as follows;
 (1) it dispels fear; (2) it brings glory to the possessor; (3) it is indestructible; (4) it is pleasing, (5) it is bright; (6) it is valuable (7) it brings prosperity (8) it is highly regarded; (9) it is to be protected carefully; (10) it is easily transportable.

All these ten characteristics are to be found in the Lord also.

if You should ask — Here the commentators suggest that the gopis have induced Kṛṣṇa into a trance, for He has completely forgotten himself in his ecstasy at realising the *jñāna* (wisdom), *bhakti* (devotion), *vairāgya* (renunciation); and *anurāga* (madness in love) of the gopis.

we need to observe as of old the Margazhi bath — The bath as mentioned before is representative of immersion in love and devotion. This expression also implies that, because they have now attained the Lord, they should not abandon their duties.

An observance of ancient tradition, — From this it is evident that Margali Bath is one of the observances from olden times and it belongs to the category of '*Sisṭhānuṣṭhams*' (i.e., observances of great men) they are considered to be more sacred than even those truths mentioned in the Vedas.

The gopis now enumerate the accessories necessary for the *vrataṁ*; milk-white conches similar to the Pañcajanya, whose sound would resound throughout the whole world, making those opposed to the vow shudder with fear; the big *parai* (drum) to announce the festivities, the hymn-singers who will bless us standing in front facing us; the standing-lamps which are auspicious and which enable us to see one another clearly; the lofty banner-which would be seen from a distance by all and invite them to join the celebrations; and the canopy which prevents dew-drops falling on our heads.

The various paraphernalia requested represent wisdom and attitudes that make for unification with Kṛṣṇa. The conch named *Pāñcajanya* which the Lord carries symbolises the praṇava AUM which represents the four states of consciousness; waking (A), dreaming (U), deep sleep (M) and the three together represent that fourth state of transcendental consciousness. The drum stands for the concept that we are all entirely dependent (*paratantrya*) upon the Lord. The professional cantors indicate the need for the company of serious experienced spiritual aspirants in any devotional enterprise. The lamps stands for the knowledge that we exist for His pleasure and service alone. The pendants represents service to the Lord. The canopy represents selflessness and charity to others.

The question arises as to why the term “canopy” does not refer to ādiśeṣa which would be more appropriate? The answer is that ādiśeṣa cannot bear to leave the Lord even for a millionth part of a second! This being the case how could he be given over to the gopis? So the Lord gave them His shawl instead!

O Lord who reclines on the banyan leaf — after the dissolution of the cosmos Lord Kṛṣṇa, containing the entire cosmos in His belly reclines upon a banyan leaf floating in the ocean of undifferentiated unity.

After hearing what the Gopis want, Kṛṣṇa retorted "O gopis! how can I obtain all the accessories that you ask for! It's impossible!". To this, the girls beautifully answered in addressing Him as *ālin ilaiyāy!* "You who recline upon the banyan leaf! Is there anything in this world impossible to be achieved by you — You who is able to protect the whole Universe during Pralaya by keeping it in your small body, reposing on a tender banyan leaf?"

In this connection, there is a beautiful verse by Nammāḷvar.

My great *Mayan* (Vishnu)— who in reposing on the tender banyan leaf, concealing in his bosom, Siva, Brahma, Indra, the worlds, the animate and inanimate things in them, the five elements, land, water, fire, air and space, the sun, the moon, the stars the planets, and other things, without letting out a bit even a single thing— He is the one Supreme Lord. (Tiruvasiriyam, st. 7)

“Our resolve depends entirely on your grace, if you refuse to give, there is none to compel you.” Further the expression *ālin ilaiyāy! arul* hints that the Lord is omnipotent and can therefore create any number of the accessories for us and give them.

What has been stated in lines 4-7 is still followed in Śrīrangam, when the Lord is taken out in procession during Margali month. He is accompanied by the blowing of conches, and throbbing of drums and the recital of the Tirupallāṇḍu, and the dāsanambis holding fire-brands, banners and canopies.

Esoteric Purport

“O Lord! most, endearing to devotees! We want the following accessories for Your Service (that Service which has been handed down from time immemorial and which should be continued by every one) and those accessories are:—

- (1) conches — a realisation of *ananyārha-śeṣatvam* — destitution of any other means except servitude (Indicated by the *praṇava*).
- (2) Drum — a realisation of *pāratantriya* — reliance upon Kṛṣṇa for everything. (indicated by the word *namaḥ*)
- (3) Cantors — *sat-sahavāsam* — the company of the spiritually minded.
- (4) lamps — a knowledge of *bhagavata-śeṣatva-jñāna* — service rendered to the devotees.
- (5) banners — a desire for *bhagavat kainkarya* — service to the Lord directly.
- (6) canopy — *bhogdṛtva nivṛtti* — abandonment of the ego and selflessness.

Please bestow on us the above-mentioned gifts. O Lord who protects all, during *Pralaya* by concealing them in your bosom, reposing on the banyan leaf! if it please you to give us all that we desire, our *nonbu* will end successfully".

☀ Stanza 27

kūḍārai vellum cīr govindā | undannai
 pāḍi paṛai koṇḍu yām peṛu śammānam |
 nāḍu pugazhum paricināl nannāga |
 cūḍakamē tōḷvaḷaiyē tōḍē cevippuvē |
 pāḍagamē ēnnanaiya pal kalanum yām aṇivōm |
 āḍaiy uḍuppōm adan pinnē pāṛ śōṛu |
 mūḍa ney peydu muzhangai vazhi vāra |
 kūḍiyirundu kuḷirndēlōr empāvāy ||

*O Govinda! you can easily win over those who are opposed to you,
 The rewards we gain from singing Your praises,
 and obtaining the drum will be universal acclaim,
 Many ornaments we shall wear, bracelets and armlets,
 rings for the lower ear and flower-like ornaments for the upper,
 we shall wear lovely robes, and then partake of milk-rice;
 soaked with ghee that drips down our elbows as we eat,
 Thus shall we be in bliss, cool and united with You.*

Commentary

It is tradition to cook and serve sweet rice with lots of ghee on the day that this stanza is chanted in the temples. The gopis now tell the Lord how they will celebrate this great event. It is in contrast with the austerities mentioned at the beginning of the poem. In the previous

stanza, the gopis enumerated all they need for the *Vratam* and in this stanza, they deal with the fruits of the *Vratam* — they would all mingle and sit together with the Lord and partake of the Ambrosial food, the ghee thereof flowing down the elbow.

O Govinda! you can easily win over those who are opposed to you — whose greatness and sweetness subdues even your enemies — Lord Kṛṣṇa can so easily defeat his greatest enemies but stands humbled before his devotees! The Gopis are hinting "You seem to think that you have defeated us by your exquisite beauty, but in actuality *you* are defeated by our *jñāna*, *bhakti* and *vairāgya*."

The Lord will destroy all those who offend Him by the three *kāraṇas*, viz., thought, word and deed; and He is subdued before one, who has surrendered not even sincerely but in token only! Rāma told Rāvana at the end of the first day's battle that he could go that day and come the next day for battle, even then Rāvana never realised his adversary's prowess, and because he was "an arrogant demon" (*vaṇaṅgalil arakkam*) he failed to surrender to the Lord and was therefore destroyed on the battlefield. Vibhīṣana on the other hand surrendered to the Lord, and obtained all prosperity. Though Lord Rāma had expressed the hope— "*ya tīva rāvana svayam*" (Let it be even Rāvana), the demon never approached him.

Further, in Kṛṣṇāvatāra, he punished Duryodhana, for he stood aloof from Him: but He was subdued before the Pāṇḍavas and not only acted as messenger for them, He also served as charioteer to Arjuna. Śrī Vedānta Deśikan says "O Kṛṣṇa your glory increased considerably, for you act according to the wishes of your bhaktas, stooping to do such menial services as a messenger and a charioteer."— His *kalyāṇa* (auspicious) *guṇas* make the most ignorant person enlightened. He wins His devotees by His perfection, and enemies by arrows.

Govinda — This word signifies that it is not incumbent that one should be in communion with the Lord, to gain His protection and Grace, but if one has not entertained any idea of separating oneself from the Lord — that in itself is sufficient to gain His protection and Grace. The commentators point out that the Lord is addressed as Govinda for the first time in the poem. Govinda is a very popular name for Kṛṣṇa and has several meanings; 'Lord-of-the-Earth', 'Lord-of-speech', 'Lord-of-cows' all of these being appropriate in the context. By calling Kṛṣṇa *Govinda* the gopis are referring to Him as belonging to the same community of cow-herders as them as well as being the Lord of the entire universe. He is brought emotionally closer through the use of this more informal name.

The rewards we gain from singing Your praises — The rewards are the garlands, the ornaments and the clothes worn by the Lord and thereafter offered to the devotees. It is said that Bhaṭṭar used to call these *prasādams* (divine things) by the term — *yām peṇu sammānam*.

we shall wear lovely robes — we shall wear dresses hallowed by your contact — we are going to dress ourselves beautifully and feast ourselves sumptuously. The impending union with the Lord is like a marriage and this is a concept which is widely used in many religions. It is proper that the gopis will wear their best attire and ornaments. The bangles are indicative of the palms joined (*anjali*) in salutation to Kṛṣṇa. The armlets represent the conch and discus which are branded on the shoulders at the sacrament of initiation (*pañcasamskāra*). The earrings represent the three sacred mantras. The lower earring the *aṣṭhākṣari*, the upper earring the *dvaya* mantra, and the anklets represent the *carama śloka*. The robe represents humility and the total resignation to the Lord.

and then partake of milk-rice; soaked with ghee that drips down our elbows as we eat — food cooked in milk and saturated with ghee to such an extent, that when a morsel is taken in the hand, the ghee flows down the elbow — The sweet rice cooked in ghee symbolises sweetness & delight of the union with God.

Thus shall we be in bliss, cool and united with You — When we undertook the rite, we vowed that we shall neither take ghee nor drink milk but now, that we have achieved our aim which is union with you, we can take ghee in plenty with rice cooked in milk.

Esoteric Purport

“O Lord! Thou hast bestowed the hands, legs, head, tongue and other organs to do service to Thee, each in its own capacity, and also Thou hast instituted the Scriptural truths. Still there are some who say "I won't bow to Thee, for I am not a servant of Thine! " O Magnanimous One! you guide even the wicked people to the right path by displaying your magnetic qualities and beauty. By singing your glory and chanting your names, we hope to attain our goal in life. Please listen to us; we request you to protect us by granting the five following essentials indispensable for any one seeking Moksha (*Mumukshu*) and they are:—

The *nāmam* on the forehead of every Vaiṣṇava symbolising Vishnu's lotus feet;

The *Cakra* and *Śaṅka* branded on the right and left shoulders signifying belonging to the lord.

The *Aṣṭhākṣarī* or the *Tirumantra* which yields *ātma-svarūpa-jñāna* (knowledge of the nature of one's own Self).

The *Dvaya* which yields devotion (*Bhakti*); and

The *Carama Śloka* which yields dispassion (*Vairagya*).

Further, you must grace us in such a way that we must achieve *śeṣattva-jñāna* for servitude to God as our sole goal out of our already existing *jñāna*, *bhakti* and *vairāgya*; and thereafter to do service (*kainkarya*) unto you with total mindfulness of our dependence upon You alone (*paratantriya jñāna*) overflowing ourselves.”

The realisation of the meanings and truths enshrined in this stanza is absolutely essential for every Vaiṣṇava and as such this verse occupies a high place in Vaiṣṇava liturgy. Thus, we find that the objects prayed for, in the previous stanza and the enjoyment spoken of in this stanza are, of course, figurative and they really refer to the attainment of God and the enjoyment of highest bliss along with God, of the Self freed from this Samsāra or cycle of birth and death, by the Grace of God.

☀ Stanza 28

kaṛavaikaḷ pin cennu kānam cērndunbōm |
 aṛivonnum illāda āykkulattu | undannaip
 piṛavi peṇundanai puṇṇiyam yām uḍaiyōm |
 kuṛaivonnum illāda govindā | untannōḍu
 uṛavēl namakkiṅ ozhikkavozhiyādu |
 aṛiyāda pillāikalōm anbināl | undannai
 śirupēr azhaittanavum cīriyarulādē |
 iṛaivā! nī tārāy paṛai ēlōr empāvāy ||

*We follow our cattle and eat in the woods,
 ignorant folk of the menial cowherd clan. Yet it
 is our good fortune that You have been born amongst us.*

*O Govinda, immaculate One, the bond we have
 with You can never be undone by anyone.*

*Unsophisticated milk-maids as we are, out of love have
 we called You by trivial names, don't be angry O Lord!*

Nor withhold Your gracious drum!

Commentary

In this stanza Godā declares that Kṛṣṇa is the end as well as the means. These humble cowherd folk do not follow the way of knowledge (*jñāna*), works (*karma*) or devotion (*bhakti*) — they have simply surrendered themselves totally to the Lord (*prapatti*). The *prapanna* recognises that he or she is worthless, lacking in intelligence and means to effect one's own salvation, once the *prapanna* has placed complete faith in Kṛṣṇa it becomes His obligation to redeem the fallen one. This stanza deals with the means (*prāpakam*) which can directly lead us to the goal (*prāpyam*). The means is the Lord Himself, the magnitude of whose glory and grace infinitely exceeds the depth of our lowliness and impurity. The gift of Grace is entirely dependant upon the will of Kṛṣṇa — no good works, knowledge or devotion or even self-surrender (*prapatti*) can induce Grace from the Lord. Though there is no means except the Lord Himself, we must and ought to make ourselves fit for receiving Grace by acknowledging our helplessness (*akiñcinyam*), realising that there is no other means (*ananyagatitvam*) and take refuge in Kṛṣṇa having realised the indissoluble relationship between ourselves and him. This is done by contemplating upon the Lord's infinite goodness, and mercy and on our weakness and sinfulness, by submissively apologising for past misconduct and by praying for Him to take us under His gracious Feet. The following important points are made by Godā:—

kaṇavaikaḥ pin śeṇṇu — In this line, the Gopis refer to (1) their dearth of meritorious actions, i.e., their vocation is simply to “follow their cows to the forest” — this is the result of their past karma and indicates a lack of merit.

aṇivonṇum illāda āy kulattu — A people which has no claims whatsoever to knowledge - they refer here to their (2) simplicity and lack of any social status.

kuṇaivonṇum illāda govindā — You, Govinda! who have no wants and no imperfections whatsoever — here they refer to the (3) Perfection of the Lord's attributes

uṇavēl namakku ingu ozhikka ozhiyādu — the relationship between you and ourselves here cannot be dissolved not matter what either of us may do. They refer to the (4) Indissoluble relationship between the *jīvas* and the Lord.

śīriyarulādē — “Pray, do not get offended at our failings” - they beseech (5) forgiveness for their past sins and failings.

iṇaivā! nī tārāy paṇai — O Lord! Grant us our hearts' desire — here they refer (6) to the attainment of their *Puruṣārtha*.

The above-mentioned six points are the stages to perfection for a *prapanna* or one who has taken refuge in God.

We follow our cattle — The Ayar girls say that their Guru is the cow, which is devoid of any good birth, knowledge, or conduct. This is a metaphor denoting total lack of means to attain the Lord. A person after his initiation (*upanayanam*) is expected to learn the Vedas and Śāstras under a Sat-ācārya noted for his birth, erudition, and conduct. After learning and gathering sufficient knowledge he is expected to perform his duties regularly; then,

conquering the senses, he must cultivate dispassion and then through Yoga, he must attain Self-realisation (*ātma-jñāna*), and to realise the essential nature of the Jīvatma, and that of the Paramatma and lastly, attain the Supreme Beatitude. So one is expected to mount up these steps initiated by his ācārya. The gopis hint that their ācārya is only the cow and no Vedic Pandit at all!!

going to the forest — The Lord told the gopis that their vocation of tending the cattle in holy places can be counted as 'Karma Yoga'. They reply that these forests are not sanctified like the Daṇḍakāraṇya or Naimiśāraṇya by the presence of sages, but they are thorny forests where the wicked demons and hunters reside.

To this, the Lord replied "As you are milkmaids, your ordained profession is the tending of cows," and it can be reasonably counted as *Varṇa-Dharmānuṣṭhāna*; further, your stay in the forests can be considered as equivalent to *Vānaprastha-Dharma*. Thus, under these circumstances, your vocation may be counted as KARMA YOGA.



Hearing this, the Gopis refuted all His arguments in one word, viz. *unbōm* — “we do nothing but eat. O Lord! we go to the forest not with the idea of doing *Varṇa-Dharmānuṣṭhāna* or of upholding the *Vānaprastha-Dharma*, but only with the sole idea of filling our belly and eking out our livelihood.”

śērndunbōm — “We will eat as soon as we reach the forest” — “without giving in charity even a morsel of food to our neighbour. Moreover, we will be going on eating while we are walking. We don't care for other's hunger.”

ignorant folk of the menial cowherd clan. — "O Kṛṣṇa! Do you think that we have any learning whatsoever? Not at all, for how can you expect knowledge in gluttons?" We are not wise like Vidura or Sabari. our knowledge is due to our vocation (*karma*) and not due to devotion (*bhakti*). Even that vocational knowledge is directed only to eking out our livelihood and not towards attaining salvation. When such is our case, you may perhaps be under the impression that we can attain wisdom at some time in the future. But O Lord! we are born in a race which occupies one of the lowest rungs on the social ladder. Being so ignorant, we take the liberty of approaching you because we are fortunate in having you born in our tribe!"

is our good fortune that You have been born amongst us — We have actually brought you up, the embodiment of Virtue, by feeding you with milk and food. When you are in our midst, it is not necessary that we should do any other Dharma. You are the guiding-light to our tribe. The expression goes "Kṛṣṇam Dharmam Sanātanam" and Yaśoda achieved all greatness by having you as her son. Similarly, we also achieved all our greatness by being born as

contemporaries among the Ayar People in which you are born.

This statement denotes the pride they feel for, the Lord, who of His own accord, has come to their very abodes and also endeared Himself without any reserve so that they can utilise Him in whatever way they pleased.

O Govinda, immaculate One — The All-perfect Govinda! — the Ayar girls hint that "You (Lord) are on a higher level and we are on a lower level. Please direct your flood of grace into the abyss of our hearts." Bhaṭṭar also told the Lord of Śrīraṅgam "You are a lofty mountain and I am a deep abyss; please fill this abyss with your grace." Śrī Vedānta Deśikan in his Daya-śatakam says that Lord Veṅkaṭeśa by His infinite Grace made Guha, Sugriva, Sabari, Kuchela, the hunch-backed woman, Mālākāra and the Gopis all equal.

the bond we have with You can never be undone by anyone — The relationship between you and ourselves cannot be dissolved, try as you or your relatives, or we or our relatives, or all of us together may might!

According to Pillai Lokācārya, the relationship between the Paramatma and the Jivātma is said to be of nine kinds — *nava vidha sambandhaḥ*.

In these nine ways, the Paramātma and Jivātma are inseparably intertwined and cannot exist in isolation from each other. separation between the two is impossible!²

	Paramātma	Jivātma
1	Parent	child
2	Protector	The protected
3	Master	Servant
4	Husband	Spouse
5	The Goal	The seeker
6	The owner	The possession
7	The supporter	The supported
8	The Super-Self	The Body
9	The Enjoyer	The enjoyed.

Unsophisticated milk-maids as we are, out of love have we called You by trivial names — This expression gives reasons for addressing the Lord by familiar terms requesting at the same time His forgiveness. The reasons are (1) ignorance (2) innocence and (3) abundant love.

śirupēr — small name — The 'small name' here referred to is "Nārāyaṇa". The 'great name' is "Govinda". Nārāyaṇa signifies His transcendence (*paratva*) and Govinda, His accessibility (*saṁlābha*). Arjuna absorbed in the accessibility of the Lord, forgot His transcendence, and later upon seeing the Cosmic Vision (*viśvarūpa darśana*) had to beg for forgiveness. But the gopis being absorbed in the transcendence of Kṛṣṇa, forgot His accessibility, and are now begging for His forgiveness; for, are they not guilty of eulogising His transcendence, when the Lord has purposely descended on this earth to demonstrate accessibility? Are they not guilty of calling Him by His small name — Nārāyaṇa, when He attained the Great Name 'Govinda', after the coronation by Indra!

The greatness of 'Govinda nāma' can be demonstrated by the fact that it was able to safeguard the chastity of Draupadi, when she cried in utter distress, holding her hands up, "Govinda! Govinda!" in Duryodhana's Court.

Nor withhold Your gracious drum — nī tāṛāy paṛai — "You give us the drum" — The stress is on the word 'you'. The *bhāvārtha* is — He turned to Nappinnai, standing near and asked her to bestow what they wanted because as a woman, she knew the mind of the gopis better;

² This is in sharp contrast to other religions which teach that the soul is a mere creation of God and that after a "judgement day" some will be united with Him for eternity and some will be separated from Him and suffer eternal torture in hell!

to this they retorted:— "she has already bestowed what we wanted i.e. *You!* (cp. Stanza 20) and hence it is now your turn to bestow the '*parai*' or the *purushartha*".

Esoteric Purport

“O Svamin! We have spent our time in feeding our body, but not our spirits, thinking that the impermanent '*samsāra*' in the be-all and end-all of our existence. Though we are devoid of knowledge (*jñāna*), devotion (*bhakti*) and dispassion (*vairāgya*), yet, we are born among a people, which seeks refuge in You alone and in none else, as a panacea for its evils. You, the Omniscient, Omnipotent Almighty have descended to a low level to be born amongst us, only for the purpose of bringing us joy and happiness. It is our great fortune that you have heartily and freely mingled with us without any reserve and thereby we have achieved the goals of our lives. O Govinda! You are the owner and we are the owned and if anyone were to analyse this relationship in depth, he would find that it is indissoluble either by You, the All-powerful, or us mortals. O Lord! When we failed to realise your greatness, we might have called you by 'small names' due to our ignorance; again when we realised your greatness, we might have continued to call you by 'small names' due to our abundance of love. Please don't get angry, but forgive us, showering your Grace upon us, granting our desires.”

☀ Stanza 29

cittañ ciṟu kālē vandunnai cēvittu | un
 pottā-maṟai aḍiyē pōttum porul kēḷāy |
 pettam mēyttuṇṇum kulattiḷ pirandu | nī
 kuttēval enḡaḷai kolḷāmal pōḡādu |
 ittai paṟai kolvān annu kāṇ govindā!
 ettaikkum ēzhēzh piṟavikkum | undannōḍu
 uttōmē yāvōm unakkē nām āt ceyvōm |
 mattai naṇ kāmaṅgaḷ mātṭēlōr empāvāy ||

*In the early hours of the morning, we have come to worship You,
 and praise Your golden, lotus-like feet.
 Born are we in the cowherd caste, You
 should not decline our service and homage.
 Harken O Govinda! Not only for today do we seek the drum,
 but for ever more, seven times seven births, we
 would be one with You, and serve You and You alone;
 Change all our other desires O Lord!*

Commentary

The commentators consider this, the penultimate verse to be the most important one. In it Godā declares emphatically that the purpose of all this observance is not the mere drum but disinterested eternal love and service to Kṛṣṇa alone. The jīva is dependent upon Kṛṣṇa for its existence and its goal is to serve and live for His pleasure alone. The elders of Vrindāvan wanted the maidens to perform the vow for rains and for their getting good husbands, but the maidens have lost themselves totally in God-love to the exclusion of all else. The material goal has been transformed into a transcendental desire to love and to serve Kṛṣṇa. They have even rejected the concept of heaven and actually desire to take more births in order to serve and love Him. We find that the highest purpose of life was outlined in the opening stanza (No. I) in somewhat veiled language. That veil is now unceremoniously brushed aside, and the highest *Puruṣārtha* or object of human ambition is clearly declared by Godā. This is the

crowning stanza of the entire *prabandham* and contains the quintessence of Viṣiṣṭhādvaita Philosophy.

In the early hours of the morning — This conveys the meaning that, as we are very young girls, it is not convenient for us to rise from our beds in this chilly weather, even after the day has dawned. We have come to you even though you should have come to us! It is said that in the very early morning — *brahma-muhūrta*, ignorance or *ajñāna* will vanish and spiritual wisdom will develop.

we have come — from our couch to your couch, we came, after surmounting vigilance, gate-keepers and inner bedsteads.

Born are we in the cowherd caste, — having been born in a caste which ekes out its livelihood by grazing cows — There must be some purpose for you to incarnate amongst us. If you reject our *kainkarya* or service your incarnation becomes useless.

You should not decline our service and homage. — “You cannot refuse to take us as your personal servants” — Here *kuṛṇēva!* (service) denotes *antaraṅga kainkarya*, or personal service. Our service to your lotus feet should be unceasing, like Lakshmana's service to Rāma.

koḷlāmal pōgādu — The two negatives emphasise that “even though we may go astray, you must turn us into the right path of *kainkarya* to you.”

Harken! — The Gopis stress this, because Lord Kṛṣṇa has completely forgotten about the purpose for which they have come to Him, being deeply absorbed in their devotional sentiment (*bhakti*) towards Him.

O Govinda! — This word stresses that the Lord was a cowherd and therefore did not understand what the girls were after. Further, '*Govinda*' insinuates that the Lord should not think of Himself as a Mahāvarāha, Vāmana or a Hayagriva but only as one endeared to the gopis.

Not only for today do we seek the drum but for ever more! — Having heard the request of the gopis, Kṛṣṇa agreed to give them the drum, but the gopis replied that they had not come for the drum, even after specifically requesting it nine times! Kṛṣṇa was mystified, then the gopis explained that obtaining the '*parai*' was only an excuse to dupe the elders of this Gokula who had isolated them from Kṛṣṇa for so long. Their real purpose was the *darśana* and *kainkaryam* to Kṛṣṇa.

The question arises "Should the gopis have deceived the elders that they were going to perform the *nonbu*?" The answer is that according to Śāstra, in affairs of marriage and in times of distress the telling of lies is permitted. Here the gopis have the intention of uniting with Kṛṣṇa and are in danger of dying in separation from Him, so under these circumstances there is no harm in deception.³

but for ever more, seven times seven births — Kṛṣṇa said:— "I have now understood that you desire to serve me this day alone. To this, the girls retorted:— “No, not to-day only! but for ever more and for all births to come, we shall not only do service to you and only you, but also will remain related to You.”

With this declaration the Gopis totally reject any desire for *svarga* or heaven — a place of

³ *poymayyum vāymay yidatta puṇay tīrnda nanmay payakku menin* (Tirukkural 30-1) “Even falsehood is of the nature of truth if it brings out unadulterated good.”

personal enjoyment, but declare that they would prefer to be born 49 times here on earth in order to serve Kṛṣṇa!

we would be one with You, — Related to you, our existence has meaning; unrelated to you, we have no existence — This is the *śeṣatva-jñāna* or realisation of our dependent relationship to Kṛṣṇa and the corollary of this realisation is *kainkarya* or Service to Him. Our relationship is indissoluble and is true of all times, of all places, and in all circumstances.

The gopis say that they wish to serve Kṛṣṇa as Lakṣmī, the Universal Mother, had done in all His Avatāras. Lakṣmī followed Him in all His incarnations. She was Sītā in the incarnation of Śrī Rāma and Rukmini in this incarnation as Kṛṣṇa and it is said she was with Him in His other incarnations also. By the expression *unṛannōḍu uṛṛōmē yāvōm* they convey their desire to serve Him like ādiśeṣa.

This service is beautifully expressed by Poigai Āḷvār —

"If he travels, an umbrella; if he sits a throne; if he stands sandals; within the deep sea, always a raft; a jewelled lamp, fine silk, a couch for embraces, the Snake will be for Tirumal."

The gopis desire to have the intimate relationship that existed between Daśaratha & Rāma; between Vidura & Kṛṣṇa, between the wife & husband; and even, if perchance, any separation were to occur, it must be a separation like Sītā's and not like Bharata's or Nammāḷvars.

and serve You and You alone — "Service to you alone is our nature and conversely, to accept our service gladly is your nature!" The Jīva is a '*śeṣa*' or servant, that is, one whose existence is for the sole benefit of another, that is Lord Kṛṣṇa. Service then, is the only form of prayer and devotion which a person who has realised the real nature of the jīva, can properly offer to the Lord; and when it is absolutely untainted by egoism in all the three stages of its origination, its doing, and its result, it constitutes the highest goal and end of human existence. Even if any element of pride enters in the origination or doing of service, or if it is made for the pleasure of the doer, or the joint pleasure of himself and the Lord, and not for the sole pleasure of the Lord, it will be imperfect.

Change all our other desires O Lord! — Śrī Andal uses the most beautiful words at the conclusion of this crowning stanza, thereby depicting the Prayer of Prayers, the Prayer for all lovers of God and for all time. Śrī Āṇḍāl prays not for the suppression of desires, but for the sublimation of them into God-centered desires; that is to say, she prays to Kṛṣṇa that He be pleased to convert all her desires into the one desire for Him. The intensity and extensiveness of the basest desires towards the material objects should be sublimated into a desire for God and should be diverted towards spiritual attainment.

Esoteric Purport

"O Protector of all! wisdom has dawned upon us during the most auspicious early morning. We, who pined in grief at your separation have come to prostrate before you and bless your lotus feet. You are born in this world to protect all of us and as such you are duty bound to accept our *Kainkarya* - service. But don't think that you can send us away accepting our service only for to-day, for we approach you with the fervent desire, to have an indissoluble relationship with you at all times, places, and in all circumstances. We desire to render service, not for our personal pleasure, not for the joint pleasure of ourselves and yourself, but for the sole pleasure of yourself. Perchance, we may desire for other baser objects, confounded by the '*rajasa*' and '*tamasa*' gunas. Then you need not ask us what our desires are nor grant us our desires.

☀ Stanza 30

vaṅgak kaḍal kaḍainda mādhavanaik keśavanai |
 tiṅgaḷ tiru-mugattu ceyizhaiyār cenniraiṇji |
 aṅgap paṛai koṇḍavāttai | aṇi puduvai
 painkamalat taṇ teriyal bhaṭṭa-pirān godai conna |
 caṅgat tamizh mālai muppadum tappāme |
 iṅgip pariśuraippār īriraṇḍu māl varai tōḷ |
 ceṅgan tiru-mukkatu celva tiru-mālāl |
 eṅgum tiruvaruḷ pettinbuṛuvar empāvāy ||

*The lovely well-bedecked and moon-faced girls sang to Kesava,
 Lakshmi's Lord, Who has churned the Ocean full of ships.
 and secured the drum which they desired. This story has been retold, by Goda, daughter of
 the best of Brahmins, of Villiputur, with his garland
 fresh and cool, In a garland of thirty verses in classical Tamil.
 Whoever will chant these thirty stanzas regularly and faultlessly,
 Will surely win the grace of the magnificent four armed Lord Tirumal,
 With red eyes and comely face, and be happy evermore.*

Commentary

In this final stanza in accordance with poetic tradition Goda gives her name, parentage and a summary of the nature of her work. The concluding stanza also deals with the benefit one gains from a recitation of this poem, i.e. that all those who even simply recite this poem would have the Divine Grace showered on them by the loving Lord and His consort Lakṣmī, both in this world and the next. For anyone who learns this poem or recites it with devotion, the benefit will equal that of one who has actually acted in the role of a Gopi and has performed the vow. Bhaṭṭar used to say that just as the mother-cow shows compassion to its stuffed calf and yields milk as it would for its living calf, similarly God will bestow His Grace upon us also though we do not possess either the ability to emulate (*anukāram*) of Āṇḍāl or the ability to practice (*anuṣṭhānam*) of the gopis.

The lovely well-bedecked and moon-faced girls — Their faces are bright as the full-moon because of their being in the company of the Lord; They are well-ornamented, for according to Stanza 27, they wore these ornaments which were given to them by Nappinnai and Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Kesava — The Possessor of glorious hair — The Gopis began with the feet the Lord *paramaṇḍipāḍi* (stanza 2) and ended with the head.

Lakshmi's Lord, Who has churned the Ocean full of ships — Godā mentions the incident of the churning of the ocean by the devas with the object of obtaining the nectar of immortality. During that incident Lakṣmī arose from the sea and was taken by the Lord as His eternal consort. The churning of the ocean is the actual churning of the mind with the churning stick of devotion to extract the ambrosia of ecstatic love and service. The ships represent the jīvas who are tossed about on the ocean of mundane existence and require a pilot in the form of the Lord to cross over to the other side.

This story has been retold, by Goda, — godai śonna — sung by Godā, who had experienced all the mental and emotional anguish of the gopis and hence has become faultless. *Sung* — unlike the Vedas which were born of its own accord, without any originator, the Tiruppavai took its origin from the tongue of Godā and is therefore superior to even the Vedas; the Lord Kṛṣṇa is certainly superior to *Kṣīrābdi-nātha* (Lord Nārāyaṇa depicted reclining upon the

serpent couch).

the best of Brahmins, of Villiputtur — bhaṭṭa-pirān refers to Viṣṇucitta; Godā's father who was also a saint. He is known by this honorific title, for in the Pāṇḍya's court he defeated his antagonists in arguments and established firmly, that the Supreme Almighty is Viṣṇu, and none else. His service to the Lord Kṛṣṇa Vaṭapatraśāyi of Śrīvilliputtur consisted in making the garlands for the daily use in the temple.

In a garland of thirty verses in classical Tamil — Just as the Universal Mother took her birth as Śrī Āṇḍāl, the Upanishads took their birth as Tiruppavai. 'Mālai' - garland of verses - denotes that this *prabandham* is not only beautiful and pleasing to the ear, but one to be praised. Further Kṛṣṇa gave Godā only a flower (*cevippu* — St. 27), but in return she gave him a garland.

Whoever will chant these thirty stanzas regularly and faultlessly — Not leaving out even a single stanza — If even one gem is lost in a necklace, it will spoil its beauty, similarly, even if one verse is left out without being sung, the beauty of the Tiruppāvai will be diminished.

Godā states that even a correct recitation of the verses, without devotion, will bring the desired effect of winning the grace of the Lord as long as it is done with a concentrated mind. It is enough that one simply recites the verses even without understanding their inner meaning.

eṅgum — “here and elsewhere” — *inbuṛuvar*— “will attain happiness”:— in this world they will attain fame, and in the next they will attain Liberation.

Esoteric Purport

The Lord Viṣṇu, churned the Milky Ocean, without causing even a slight motion to the ships. He used the Mandhāra Hill as the churning-rod, the Snake Vasuki as the rope and through His effort attained the Goddess Lakṣmī as His consort, similarly, the Lord has churned the 'ocean of Samsāra' with His mercy, without creating even a slight discomfort to the body of the cetana, using His Saṅkalpa or Wish as the churning-rod; and His Grace as the rope, and attained a thing more precious than even Lakṣmī, viz, the Jīvatma.

The devotees of the Lord with bright faces, filled with knowledge (*jñāna*), devotion (*bhakti*) and dispassion (*vairāgya*), went to His very presence out of extreme love, and attained their desire of selfless service (*kainkarya puruṣārtha*) though ostensibly seeking the drum. This account of how the Gopis approached the Lord and obtained their desires is beautifully sung by Śrī Āṇḍāl, the daughter of Viṣṇucitta of Śrī Villiputtur and it is a Prabandham containing a garland of Tamil verses fit to be sung in groups and fit to be celebrated for all ages to come. Those who recite these verses without leaving out a single stanza shall obtain here and in the world to come, eternal happiness through the Grace of Kṛṣṇa, (the consort of Lakṣmī) with red eyes, beautiful face and with four big mountain-like shoulders.

Tradition has it that at the age of 32 Bhaṭṭar had a carbuncle on his back incised. But the only anaesthetic he would permit was the chanting and hearing of the Tiruppavai songs. When the surgeon operated on the carbuncle he did not show any pain whatsoever.

